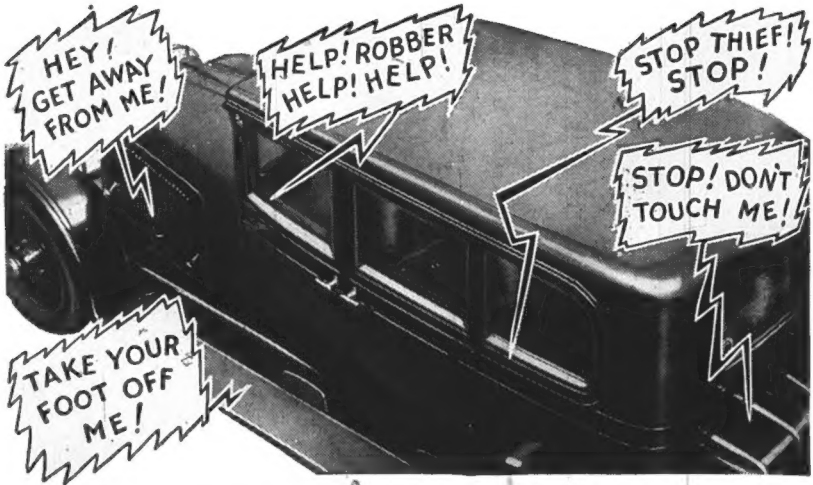

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This time Forepaugh was ready for it.

The Planet of Dread

By R. F. Starzl

THERE was no use hiding from the truth. Somebody had blundered — a fatal blunder — and they were going to pay for it! Mark Forepaugh kicked the pile of hydrogen cylinders. Only a moment ago he had broken the seals—the mendacious seals that certified to the world that the flasks were fully charged. And the flasks were empty! The supply of this precious power gas, which in an emergency should have been sufficient for six years, simply did not exist.

A stupid blunder—and Mark Forepaugh faces a lifetime of castaway loneliness in the savage welter of the planet Iora's monster-ridden jungles.

He walked over to the integrating machine, which as early as the year 2031 had begun to replace the older atomic processes, due to the shortage of the radium series metals. It was bulky and heavy compared to the atomic disintegrators, but it was much more economical and very dependable. Dependable — provided some thick-headed stock clerk at a terrestial supply station did not check in empty hydrogen cylinders instead of full ones. Forepaugh's unwonted curses brought a smile to the stupid, good-natured face of his servant, Gunga—he who had been banished for life from his native Mars for his impiety in closing his single round eye during the sacred Ceremony of the Wells.

The Earth man was at this steaming hot, unhealthful trading station under

the very shadow of the South Pole of the minor planet Inra for an entirely different reason. One of the most popular of his set on the Earth, an athletic hero, he had fallen in love, and the devoutly wished-for marriage was only prevented by lack of funds. The opportunity to take charge of this richly paid, though dangerous, outpost of civilization had been no sooner offered than taken. In another week or two the relief ship was due to take him and his valuable collection of exotic Inranian orchids back to the Earth, back to a fat bonus, Constance, and an assured future.

It was a different young man who now stood tragically before the useless power plant. His slim body was bowed, and his clean features were drawn. Grimly he raked the cooling dust that had been forced in the integrating chamber by the electronic rearrangement of the original hydrogen atoms—finely powdered iron and silicon—the "ashes" of the last tank of hydrogen.

GUNGA chuckled.

"What's the matter?" Forepaugh barked. "Going crazy already?"

"Me, haw! Me, haw! Me thinkin'," Gunga rumbled. "Haw! We got, haw! plenty hydr'gen." He pointed to the low metal roof of the trading station. Though it was well insulated against sound, the place continually vibrated to the low murmur of the Inranian rains that fell interminably through the perpetual polar day. It was a rain such as is never seen on Earth, even in the tropics. It came in drops as large as a man's fist. It came in streams. It came in large, shattering masses that broke before they fell and filled the air with spray. There was little wind, but the steady green downpour of water and the brilliant continuous flashing of lightning shamed the dull soggy twilight produced by the large, hot, but hidden sun.

"*Your* idea of a joke!" Forepaugh growled in disgust. He understood what Gunga's grim pleasantry referred to. There was indeed an incalculable quantity of hydrogen at hand. If some means could be found to separate the hydrogen atoms from the oxygen in the world of water around them they would not lack for fuel. He thought of electrolysis, and relaxed with a sigh. There was no power. The generators were dead, the air drier and cooler had ceased its rhythmic pulsing nearly an hour ago. Their lights were gone, and the automatic radio utterly useless.

"This is what comes of putting all your eggs in one basket," he thought, and let his mind dwell vindictively on the engineers who had designed the equipment on which his life depended.

An exclamation from Gunga startled him. The Martian was pointing to the ventilator opening, the only part of this strange building that was not hermetically sealed against the hostile life of Inra. A dark rim had appeared at its margin, a loathsome, black-green rim that was moving, spreading out. It crept over the metal walls like the low-lying smoke of a fire, yet it was a solid. From it emanated a strong, miasmatic odor.

"The giant mold!" Forepaugh cried. He rushed to his desk and took out his flash pistol, quickly set the localizer so as to cover a large area. When he turned he saw, to his horror, Gunga about to smash into the mold with his ax. He sent the man spinning with a blow to the ear.

"Want to scatter it and start it growing in a half-dozen places?" he snapped. "Here!"

HE pulled the trigger. There was a light, spiteful "ping" and for an instant a cone of white light stood out in the dim room like a solid thing. Then it was gone, and with it was gone the black mold, leaving a circular area of blistered paint on the wall and an acrid odor in the air. Forepaugh leaped to the ventilating louver and closed it tightly.

"It's going to be like this from now on," he remarked to the shaken Gunga. "All these things wouldn't bother us as long as the machinery kept the building dry and cool. They couldn't live in here. But it's getting damp and hot. Look at the moisture condensing on the ceiling!"

Gunga gave a guttural cry of despair. "It knows, Boss; look!"

Through one of the round, heavily framed ports it could be seen, the lower part of its large, shapeless body half-floating in the lashing water that covered their rocky shelf to a depth of several feet, the upper part spectral and gray. It was a giant amoeba, fully six feet in diameter in its present spheroid form, but capable of assuming any shape that would be useful. It had an envelope of tough, transparent matter, and was filled with a fluid that was now cloudy and then clear. Near the center there was a mass of darker matter, and this was undoubtedly the seat of its intelligence.

The Earth man recoiled in horror! A single cell with a brain! It was unthinkable. It was a biological nightmare. Never before had he seen one—had, in fact, dismissed the stories of the Inranian natives as a bit of primitive superstition, had laughed at these gentle, stupid amphibians with whom he traded when they, in their imperfect language, tried to tell him of it.

They had called it the Ul-lul. Well, let it be so. It was an amoeba, and it was watching him. It floated in the downpour and watched him. With what? It had no eyes. No matter, it was watching him. And then it suddenly flowed outward until it became a disc rocking on the waves. Again its fluid form changed, and by a series of elongations and contractions it flowed through the water at an incredible speed. It came straight for the window, struck the thick, unbreakable glass with a shock that could be felt by the men inside. It flowed over the glass and over the building. It was trying to eat them, building and all! The part of its body over the port became so thin that it was almost invisible. At last, its absolute limit reached, it dropped away, baffled, vanishing amid the glare of the lightning and the frothing waters like the shadows of a nightmare.

THE heat was intolerable and the air was bad.

"Haw, we have to open vent'lator, Boss!" gasped the Martian.

Forepaugh nodded grimly. It wouldn't do to smother either. Though to open the ventilator would be to invite another invasion by the black mold, not to mention the amoebae and other fabulous monsters that had up to now been kept at a safe distance by the repeller zone, a simple adaptation of a very old discovery. A zone of mechanical vibrations, of a frequency of 500,000 cycles per second, was created by a large quartz crystal in the water, which was electrically operated. Without power, the protective zone had vanished.

"We watch?" asked Gunga.

"You bet we watch. Every minute of the 'day' and 'night.'"

He examined the two chronometers, assuring himself that they were well wound, and congratulated himself that they were not dependent on the defunct power plant for energy. They were his only means of measuring the passage of time. The sun, which theoretically would seem to travel round and round the horizon, rarely succeeded in making its exact location known, but appeared to shift strangely from side to side at the whim of the fog and water.

"Th' fellas," Gunga remarked, coming out of a study. "Why not come?" He referred to the Inranians.

"Probably know something's wrong. They can tell the quartz oscillator is stopped. Afraid of the Ul-lul, I suppose."

"'Squeer," demurred the Martian. "Ul-lul not bother fellas."

"You mean it doesn't follow them

into the underbrush. But it would find tough going there. Not enough water; trees there, four hundred feet high with thorny roots and rough bark—they wouldn't like that. Oh no, these natives ought to be pretty snug in their dens. Why, they're as hard to catch as a muskrat! Don't know what a muskrat is, huh? Well, it's the same as the Inranians, only different, and not so ugly."

FOR the next six days they existed in their straitened quarters, one guarding while the other slept, but such alarms as they experienced were of a minor nature, easily disposed of by their flash pistol. It had not been intended for continuous service, and under the frequent drains it showed an alarming loss of power. Forepaugh repeatedly warned Gunga to be more sparing in its use, but that worthy persisted in his practice of using it against every trifling invasion of the poisonous Inranian cave moss that threatened them, or the warm, soggy water-spiders that hopefully explored the ventilator shaft in search of living food.

"Bash 'em with a broom, or something! Never mind if it isn't nice. Save our flash gun for something bigger."

Gunga only looked distressed.

On the seventh day their position became untenable. Some kind of sea creature, hidden under the ever-replenished storm waters, had found the concrete emplacements of their trading post to its liking. Just how it was done was never learned. It is doubtful that the creatures could gnaw away the solid stone—more likely the process was chemical, but none the less it was effective. The foundations crumbled; the metal shell subsided, rolled half over so that silty water leaked in through the straining seams, and threatened at any moment to be buffeted and urged away on the surface of the flood toward that distant vast sea which covers nine-tenths of the area of Inra.

"Time to mush for the mountains," Forepaugh decided.

Gunga grinned. The Mountains of Perdition were, to his point of view, the only part of Inra even remotely inhabitable. They were sometimes fairly cool, and though perpetually pelted with rain, blazing with lightning and reverberating with thunder, they had caves that were fairly dry and too cool for the black mold. Sometimes, under favorable circumstances on their rugged peaks, one could get the full benefit of the enormous hot sun for whose actinic rays the Martian's starved system yearned.

"Better pack a few cans of the food tablets," the white man ordered. "Take a couple of waterproof sleeping bags for us, and a few hundred fire pellets. You can have the flash pistol; it may have a few more charges in it."

FOREPAUGH broke the glass case marked "Emergency Only" and removed two more flash pistols. Well he knew that he would need them after passing beyond the trading area—perhaps sooner. His eyes fell on his personal chest, and he opened it for a brief examination. None of the contents seemed of any value, and he was about to pass when he dragged out a long, heavy, .45 caliber six-shooter in a holster, and a cartridge belt filled with shells. The Martian stared.

"Know what it is?" his master asked, handing him the weapon.

"Gunga not know." He took it and examined it curiously. It was a fine museum piece in an excellent state of preservation, the metal overlaid with the patina of age, but free from rust and corrosion.

"It's a weapon of the Ancients," Forepaugh explained. "It was a sort of family heirloom and is over 300 years old. One of my grandfathers used it in the famous Northwest Mounted Police. Wonder if it'll still shoot."

He leveled the weapon at a fat, sightless wriggler that came squirming through a seam, squinting unaccus-

tomed eyes along the barrel. There was a violent explosion, and the wriggler disappeared in a smear of dirty green. Gunga nearly fell over backward in fright, and even Forepaugh was shaken. He was surprised that the ancient cartridge had exploded at all, though he knew powder making had reached a high level of perfection before explosive chemical weapons had yielded to the newer, lighter, and infinitely more powerful ray weapons. The gun would impede their progress. It would be of very little use against the giant Carnivora of Inra. Yet something—perhaps a sentimental attachment, perhaps what his ancestors would have called a "hunch"—compelled him to strap it around his waist. He carefully packed a few essentials in his knapsack, together with one chronometer and a tiny gyroscopic compass. So equipped, they could travel with a fair degree of precision toward the mountains some hundred miles on the other side of a steaming forest, a-crawl with feral life, and hot with blood-lust.

MAN and master descended into the warm waters and, without a backward glance, left the trading post to its fate. There was not even any use in leaving a note. Their relief ship, soon due, would never find the station without radio direction.

The current was strong, but the water gradually became shallower as they ascended the sloping rock. After half an hour they saw ahead of them the loom of the forest, and with some trepidation they entered the gloom cast by the towering, fernlike trees, whose tops disappeared in murky fog. Tangled vines impeded their progress. Quagmires lay in wait for them, and tough weeds tripped them, sometimes throwing one or another into the mud among squirming small reptiles that lashed at them with spiked, poisonous feet and then fell to pieces, each piece to lie in the bubbling ooze until it grew again into a whole animal.

Several times they almost walked under the bodies of great, spheroidal creatures with massive short legs, whose tremendously long, sinuous necks disappeared in the leafy murk above, swaying gently like long-stalked lilies in a terrestial pond. These were szornacks, mild-tempered vegetarians whose only defense lay in their thick, blubbery hides. Filled with parasites, stinking and rancid, their decaying covering of fat effectively concealed the tender flesh underneath, protecting them from fangs and rending claws.

Deeper in the forest of the battering of the rain was mitigated. Giant neopalm leaves formed a roof that shut out not only most of the weak daylight, but also the fury of the downpour. The water collected in cataracts, ran down the boles of the trees, and roared through the semi-circular canals of the snake trees, so named by early explorers for their waving, rubbery tentacles, multiplied a millionfold, that performed the duties of leaves. Water gurgled and chuckled everywhere, spread in vast dim ponds and lakes writhing with tormented roots, upheaved by unseen, uncatalogued leviathans, rippled by translucent discs of loathsome, luminescent jelly that quivered from place to place in pursuit of microscopic prey.

Yet the impression was one of calm and quiet, and the waifs from other worlds felt a surcease of nervous tension. Unconsciously they relaxed. Taking their bearings, they changed their course slightly for the nesting place of the nearest tribe of Inranians where they hoped to get food and at least partial shelter; for their food tablets had mysteriously turned to an unpleasant viscous liquid, and their sleeping bags were alive with giant bacteria easily visible to the eye.

THEY were doomed to disappointment. After nearly twelve hours of desperate struggling through the morass, through gloomy aisles, and countless narrow escapes from prowling beasts of prey in which only the

speed and tremendous power of their flash pistols saved them from instant death, they reached a rocky outcropping which led to the comparatively dry rise of land on which a tribe of Inranians made its home. Their faces were covered with welts made by the hanging filaments of bloodsucking trees as fine as spider webs, and their senses reeled with the oppressive stench of the abysmal jungle. If the pampered ladies of the Inner Planets only knew where their thousand-dollar orchids sprang from!

Converging runways showed the opening of one of the underground dens, almost hidden from view by a bewildering maze of roots, rendered more formidable by long, sharp stakes made from the iron-hard thigh-bones of the flying kabo.

Forepaugh cupped his hands over his mouth and gave the call.

"Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf! Ouf!"

He repeated it over and over, the jungle giving back his voice in a muffled echo, while Gunga held a spare flash pistol and kept a sharp lookout for a carnivore intent on getting an unwary Inranian.

There was no answer. These timid creatures, who are often rated the most intelligent life native to primitive Inra, had sensed disaster and had fled.

Forepaugh and Gunga slept in one of the foul, poorly ventilated dens, ate of the hard, woody tubers that had not been worth taking along, and wished they had a certain stock clerk at that place at that time. They were awakened out of deep slumber by the threshing of an evil looking creature which had become entangled among the sharpened spikes. Its tremendous maw, splitting it almost in half, was opened in roars of pain that showed great yellow fangs eight inches in length. Its heavy flippers battered the stout roots and lacerated themselves in the beast's insensate rage. It was quickly dispatched with a flash pistol and Gunga cooked himself some of the meat, using a fire pellet; but despite his hunger Forepaugh did not dare eat any of it, knowing that this species, strange to him, might easily be one of the many on Inra that are poisonous to terrestials.

THEY resumed their march toward the distant invisible mountains, and were fortunate in finding somewhat better footing than they had on their previous march. They covered about 25 miles on that "day," without untoward incident. Their ray pistols gave them an insuperable advantage over the largest and most ferocious beasts they could expect to meet, so that they became more and more confident, despite the knowledge that they were rapidly using up the energy stored in their weapons. The first one had long ago been discarded, and the charge indicators of the other two were approaching zero at a disquieting rate. Forepaugh took them both, and from that time on he was careful never to waste a discharge except in case of a direct and unavoidable attack. This often entailed long waits or stealthy detours through sucking mud, and came near to ending both their lives.

The Earth man was in the lead when it happened. Seeking an uncertain footing through a tangle of low-growing, thick, ghastly white vegetation, he placed a foot on what seemed to be a broad, flat rock projecting slightly above the ooze. Instantly there was a violent upheaval of mud; the seeming rock flew up like a trap-door, disclosing a cavernous mouth some seven feet across, and a thick, triangular tentacle flew up from its concealment in the mud in a vicious arc. Forepaugh leaped back barely in time to escape being swept in and engulfed. The end of the tentacle struck him a heavy blow on the chest, throwing him back with such force as to bowl Gunga over, and whirling the pistols out of his hands into a slimy, bulbous growth nearby, where they stuck in the phosphorescent cavities the force of their impact had made.

THERE was no time to recover the weapons. With a bellow of rage the beast was out of its bed and rushing at them. Nothing stayed its progress. Tough, heavily scaled trees thicker than a man's body shuddered and fell as its bulk brushed by them. But it was momentarily confused, and its first rush carried it past its dodging quarry. This momentarily respite saved their lives.

Rearing its plumed head to awesome heights, its knobby bark running with brown rivulets of water, a giant tree, even for that world of giants, offered refuge. The men scrambled up the rough trunk easily, finding plenty of hand and footholds. They came to rest on one of the shelflike circumvoluting rings, some twenty-five feet above the ground. Soon the blunt brown tentacles slithered in search of them, but failed to reach their refuge by inches.

And now began the most terrible siege that interlopers in that primitive world can endure. From that cavernous, distended throat came a tremendous, world-shaking noise.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

Forepaugh put his hand to his head. It made him dizzy. He had not believed that such noise could be. He knew that no creature could long live amidst it. He tore strips from his shredded clothing and stuffed his ears, but felt no relief.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

It throbbed in his brain.

Gunga lay a-sprawl, staring with fascinated eye into the pulsating scarlet gullet that was blasting the world with sound. Slowly, slowly he was slipping. His master hauled him back. The Martian grinned at him stupidly, slid again to the edge.

Once more Forepaugh pulled him back. The Martian seemed to acquiesce. His single eye closed to a mere slit. He moved to a position between Forepaugh and the tree trunk, braced his feet.

"No you don't!" The Earth man laughed uproariously. The din was making him light-headed. It was so funny! Just in time he had caught that cunning expression and prepared for the outlashing of feet designed to plunge him into the red cavern below and to stop that hellish racket.

"And now—"

He swung his fist heavily, slamming the Martian against the tree. The red eye closed wearily. He was unconscious, and lucky.

Hungrily the Earth man stared at his distant flash pistols, plainly visible in the luminescence of their fungus bedding. He began a slow, cautious creep along the top of a vine some eight inches thick. If he could reach them. . . .

CRASH! He was almost knocked to the ground by the thud of a frantic tentacle against the vine. His movement had been seen. Again the tentacle struck with crushing force. The great vine swayed. He managed to reach the shelf again in the very nick of time.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

A bolt of lightning struck a giant fern some distance away. The crash of thunder was hardly noticeable. Forepaugh wondered if his tree would be struck. Perhaps it might even start a fire, giving him a flaming brand with which to torment his tormenter. Vain hope! The wood was saturated with moisture. Even the fire pellets could not make it burn.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

The six-shooter! He had forgotten it. He jerked it from its holster and pointed it at the red throat, emptied all the chambers. He saw the flash of yellow flame, felt the recoil, but the sound of the discharges was drowned in the Brobdignagian tumult. He drew back his arm to throw the useless toy from him. But again that unexplainable, senseless "hunch" restrained him.

He reloaded the gun and returned it to its holster.

"HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM! HOOM!"

A thought had been struggling to reach his consciousness against the pressure of the unbearable noise. The fire pellets! Couldn't they be used in some way? These small chemical spheres, no larger than the end of his little finger, had long ago supplanted actual fire along the frontiers, where electricity was not available for cooking. In contact with moisture they emitted terrific heat, a radiant heat which penetrated meat, bone, and even metal. One such pellet would cook a meal in ten minutes, with no sign of scorching or burning. And they had several hundred in one of the standard moisture-proof containers.

AS fast as his fingers could work the trigger of the dispenser Forepaugh dropped the potent little pellets down the bellowing throat. He managed to release about thirty before the bellowing stopped. A veritable tornado of energy broke loose at the foot of the tree. The giant maw was closed, and the shocking silence was broken only by the thrashing of a giant body in its death agonies. The radiant heat, penetrating through and through the beast's body, withered nearby vegetation and could be easily felt on the perch up the tree.

Gunga was slowly recovering. His iron constitution helped him to rally from the powerful blow he had received, and by the time the jungle was still he was sitting up mumbling apologies.

"Never mind," said his master. "Shin down there and cut us off a good helping of roast tongue, if it has a tongue, before something else comes along and beats us out of a feast."

"Him poison, maybe," Gunga demurred. They had killed a specimen new to zoologists.

"Might as well die of poison as starvation," Forepaugh countered.

Without more ado the Martian descended, cut out some large, juicy chunks as his fancy dictated, and brought his loot back up the tree. The meat was delicious and apparently wholesome. They gorged themselves and threw away what they could not eat, for food spoils very quickly in the Inranian jungles and uneaten meat would only serve to attract hordes of the gauzy-winged, glutinous Inranian swamp flies. As they sank into slumber they could hear the beginning of a bedlam of snarling and fighting as the lesser Carnivora fed on the body of the fallen giant.

When they awoke the chronometer recorded the passing of twelve hours, and they had to tear a network of strong fibers with which the tree had invested them preparatory to absorbing their bodies as food. For so keen is the competition for life on Inra that practically all vegetation is capable of absorbing animal food directly. Many an Inranian explorer can tell tales of narrow escapes from some of the more specialized flesh-eating plants; but they are now so well known that they are easily avoided.

A CLEAN-PICKED framework of crushed and broken giant bones was all that was left of the late bellowing monster. Six-legged water dogs were polishing them hopefully, or delving into them with their long, sinuous snouts for the marrow. The Earth man fired a few shots with his six-shooter, and they scattered, dragging the bodies of their fallen companions to a safe distance to be eaten.

Only one of the flash pistols was in working order. The other had been trampled by heavy hoofs and was useless. A heavy handicap under which to traverse fifty miles of abysmal jungle. They started with nothing for breakfast except water, of which they had plenty.

Fortunately the outcroppings of rocks and gravel washes were becoming more and more frequent, and they were

able to travel at much better speed. As they left the low-lying jungle land they entered a zone which was faintly reminiscent of a terrestial jungle. It was still hot, soggy and fetid, but gradually the most primitive aspects of the scene were modified. The overarching trees were less closely packed, and they came across occasional rock clearings which were bare of vegetation except for a dense carpet of brown, lichenlike vegetation that secreted an astonishing amount of juice. They slipped and sloshed through this, rousing swarms of odd, toothed birds, which darted angrily around their heads and slashed at them with the razor-sharp saw edges on the back of their legs. Annoying as they were, they could be kept away with branches torn from trees, and their presence connoted an absence of the deadly jungle flesh-eaters, permitting a temporary relaxation of vigilance and saving the resources of the last flash gun.

They camped that "night" on the edge of one of these rock clearings. For the first time in weeks it had stopped raining, although the sun was still obscured. Dimly on the horizon could be seen the first of the foothills. Here they gathered some of the giant, oblong fungus that early explorers had taken for blocks of porous stone because of their size and weight, and, by dint of the plentiful application of fire pellets, managed to set it ablaze. The heat added nothing to their comfort, but it dried them out and allowed them to sleep unmolsted.

AN unwary winged eel served as their breakfast, and soon they were on their way to those beckoning hills. It had started to rain again, but the worst part of their journey was over. If they could reach the top of one of the mountains there was a good chance that they would be seen and rescued by their relief ship, provided they did not starve first. The flyer would use the mountains as a base from which to search for the trading station, and it was conceivable that the skipper might actually have anticipated their desperate adventure and would look for them in the Mountains of Perdition.

They had crossed several ranges of the foothills and were beginning to congratulate themselves when the diffused light from above was suddenly blotted out. It was raining again, and above the echo-augmented thunder they heard a shrill screeching.

"A web serpent!" Gunga cried, throwing himself flat on the ground.

Forepaugh eased into a rock cleft at his side. Just in time. A great grotesque head bore down upon him, many-fanged as a medieval dragon. Between obsidian eyes was a fissure whence emanted a wailing and a foul odor. Hundreds of short, clawed legs slithered on the rocks under a long sinuous body. Then it seemed to leap into the air again. Webs grew taught between the legs, strumming as they caught a strong uphill wind. Again it turned to the attack, and missed them. This time Forepaugh was ready for it. He shot at it with his flash pistol.

NOTHING happened. The fog made accurate shooting impossible, and the gun lacked its former power. The web serpent continued to course back and forth over their heads.

"Guess we'd better run for it," Forepaugh murmured.

"Go 'head!"

They cautiously left their places of concealment. Instantly the serpent was down again, persistent if inaccurate. It struck the place of their first concealment and missed them.

"Run!"

They extended their weary muscles to the utmost, but it was soon apparent that they could not escape long. A rock wall in their path saved them.

"Hole!" the Martian gasped.

Forepaugh followed him into the rocky cleft. There was a strong draft of dry air, and it would have been next

to impossible to hold the Martian back, so Forepaugh allowed him to lead on toward the source of the draft. As long as it led into the mountains he didn't care.

The natural passageway was untenanted. Evidently its coolness and dryness made it untenable for most of Inra's humidity and heat loving life. Yet the floor was so smooth that it must have been artificially leveled. Faint illumination was provided by the rocks themselves. They appeared to be covered by some microscopic phosphorescent vegetation.

After hundreds of twists and turns and interminable straight galleries the cleft turned more sharply upward, and they had a period of stiff climbing. They must have gone several miles and climbed at least 20,000 feet. The air became noticeably thin, which only exhilarated Gunga, but slowed the Earth man down. But at last they came to the end of the cleft. They could go no further, but above them, at least 500 feet higher, they saw a round patch of sky, miraculously bright blue sky!

"A pipe!" Forepaugh cried.

He had often heard of these mysterious, almost fabulous structures sometimes reported by passing travelers. Straight and true, smooth as glass and apparently immune to the elements, they had been occasionally seen standing on the very tops of the highest mountains—seen for a few moments only before they were hidden again by the clouds. Were they observatories of some ancient race, placed thus to pierce the mysteries of outer space? They would find out.

THE inside of the pipe had zigzagging rings of metal, conveniently spaced for easy climbing. With Gunga leading, they soon reached the top. But not quite.

"Eh?" said Forepaugh.

"Uh?" said Gunga.

There had not been a sound, but a distinct, definite command had registered on their minds.

"Stop!"

They tried to climb higher, but could not unclasp their hands. They tried to descend, but could not lower their feet.

The light was by now relatively bright, and as by command their eyes sought the opposite wall. What they saw gave their jaded nerves an unpleasant thrill—a mass of doughy matter of a blue-green color about three feet in diameter, with something that resembled a cyst filled with transparent liquid near its center.

And this thing began to flow along the rods, much as tar flows. From the mass extended a pseudopod; touched Gunga on the arm. Instantly the arm was raw and bleeding. Terrified, immovable, he writhed in angony. The pseudopod returned to the main mass, disappearing into its interior with the strip of bloody skin.

Its attention was centered so much on the luckless Martian that its control slipped from Forepaugh. Seizing his flash pistol, he set the localized for a small area and aimed it at the thing, intent on burning it into nothingness. But again his hand was stayed. Against the utmost of his will-power his fingers opened, letting the pistol drop. The liquid in the cyst danced and bubbled. Was it laughing at him? It had read his mind—thwarted his will again.

Again a pseudopod stretched out and a strip of raw, red flesh adhered to it and was consumed. Mad rage convulsed the Earth man. Should he throw himself tooth and nail on the monster? And be engulfed?

He thought of the six-shooter. It thrilled him.

But wouldn't it make him drop that too?

A FLASH of atavistic cunning came to him.

He began to reiterate in his mind a certain thought.

"This thing is so I can see you better—this thing is so I can see you better."

He said it over and over, with all the

passion and devotion of a celibate's prayer over a uranium fountain.

"This thing is harmless—but it will make me see you better!"

Slowly he drew the six-shooter. In some occult way he knew it was watching him.

"Oh, this is harmless! This is an instrument to aid my weak eyes! It will help me realize your mastery! This will enable me to know your true greatness. This will enable me to know you as a god."

Was it complacence or suspicion that stirred the liquid in the cyst so smoothly? Was it susceptible to flattery? He sighted along the barrel.

"In another moment your great intelligence will overwhelm me," proclaimed his surface mind desperately, while the subconscious tensed the trigger. And at that the clear liquid burst into a turmoil of alarm. Too late. Forepaugh went limp, but not before he had loosed a steel-jacketed bullet that shattered the mind cyst of the pipe denizen. A horrible pain coursed through his every fibre and nerve. He was safe in the arms of Gunga, being carried to the top of the pipe to the clean dry air, and the blessed, blistering sun.

The pipe denizen was dying. A viscous, inert mass, it dropped lower and lower, lost contact at last, shattered into slime at the bottom.

MIRACULOUS sun! For a luxurious fifteen minutes they roasted there on the top of the pipe, the only solid thing in a sea of clouds as far as the eye could reach. But no! That was a circular spot against the brilliant white of the clouds, and it was rapidly coming closer. In a few minutes it resolved itself into the *Comet*, fast relief ship of the Terrestial, Inranian, Genidian, and Zydian Lines, Inc. With a low buzz of her repulsion motors she drew alongside. Hooks were attached and ports opened. A petty officer and a crew of roustabouts made her fast.

"What the hell's going on here?" asked the cocky little terrestial who was skipper, stepping out and surveying the castaways. "We've been looking for you ever since your directional wave failed. But come on in—come on in!"

He led the way to his stateroom, while the ship's surgeon took Gunga in charge. Closing the door carefully, he delved into the bottom of his locker and brought out a flask.

"Can't be too careful," he remarked, filling a small tumbler for himself and another for his guest. "Always apt to be some snooper to report me. But say—you're wanted in the radio room."

"Radio room nothing! When do we eat?"

"Right away, but you'd better see him. Fellow from the Interplanetary News Agency wants you to broadcast a copyrighted story. Good for about three years' salary, old boy."

"All right. I'll see him"—with a happy sigh—"just as soon as I put through a personal message."

Everyone Is Invited

To "Come Over in

'THE READERS' CORNER'!"

The Lord of Space

By Victor Rousseau

"ON the day of the next full moon every living thing on earth will be wiped out of existence—unless you succeed in your mission, Lee."

Nathaniel Lee looked into the face of Silas Stark, President of the United States of the World, and nodded grimly. "I'll do my best, Sir," he answered.

"You have the facts. We know who this self-styled Black Caesar is, who has declared war upon humanity. He is a Dane named Axelson, whose father, condemned to life imprisonment for resisting the new world-order, succeeded in obtaining possession of an interplanetary liner.

"He filled it with the gang of desperate men who had been associated with him in his successful escape from the penitentiary. Together they sailed into Space. They disappeared. It was supposed that they had somehow met their death in the ether, beyond the range of human ken.

"Thirty years passed, and then this son of Axelson, born, according to his own story, of a woman whom the

A Black Caesar had arisen on Eros—and all Earth trembled at his distant menace.

It was like struggling with some vampire creatures in a hideous dream.

father had persuaded to accompany him into Space, began to radio us. We thought at first it was some practical joker who was cutting in.

"When our electricians demonstrated beyond doubt that the voice came from outer space, it was supposed that some one in our Moon Colony had acquired a transmitting machine. Then the ships we sent to the Moon Colony for gold failed to return. As you know, for seven weeks there has been no communication with the Moon. And at the last full moon the—blow—fell.

"The world depends upon you, Lee. The invisible rays that destroyed every living thing from China to Australia—one-fifth of the human race—will fall upon the eastern seaboard of America when the moon is full again. That has been the gist of Axelson's repeated communications.

"We shall look to you to return, either with the arch-enemy of the human race as your prisoner, or with the good news that mankind has been set free from the menace that overhangs it.

"God bless you, my boy!" The President of the United States of the World gripped Nat's hand and stepped down the ladder that led from the landing-stage of the great interplanetary space-ship.

THE immense landing-field reserved for the ships of the Interplanetary Line was situated a thousand feet above the heart of New York City, in Westchester County. It was a flat space set on the top of five great towers, strewn with electrified sand, whose glow had the property of dispersing the sea fogs. There, at rest upon what resembled nothing so much as iron

claws, the long gray shape of the vacuum flyer bulked.

Nat sneezed as he watched the operations of his men, for the common cold, or coryza, seemed likely to be the last of the germ diseases that would yield to medical science, and he had caught a bad one in the Capitol, while listening to the debate in the Senate upon the threat to humanity. And it was cold on the landing-stage, in contrast to the perpetual summer of the glass-roofed city below.

But Nat forgot the cold as he watched the preparations for the ship's departure. Neon and nitrogen gas were being pumped under pressure into the outer shell, where a minute charge of leucon, the newly discovered element that helped to counteract gravitation, combined with them to provide the power that would lift the vessel above the regions of the stratosphere.

In the low roof-buildings that surrounded the stage was a scene of tremendous activity. The selenium discs were flashing signals, and the radio receivers were shouting the late news; on the great power boards dials and light signals stood out in the glow of the amylite tubes. On a rotary stage a thousand feet above the ship a giant searchlight, visible for a thousand miles, moved its shaft of dazzling luminosity across the heavens.

Now the spar-aluminite outer skin of the ship grew bright with the red neon glare. Another ship, from China, dropped slowly to its stage near by, and the unloaders swarmed about the pneumatic tubes to receive the mail. The teleradio was shouting news of a failure of the Manchurian wheat crop. Nat's chief officer, a short cockney named Brent, came up to him.

"Ready to start, Sir," he said.

NAT turned to him. "Your orders are clear?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Send Benson here."

"I'm here, Sir." Benson, the ray-gunner in charge of the battery that comprised the vessel's armament, a lean Yankee from Connecticut, stepped forward.

"You know your orders, Benson? Axelson has seized the Moon and the gold-mines there. He's planning to obliterate the Earth. We've got to go in like mad dogs and shoot to kill. No matter if we kill every living thing there, even our own people who are inmates of the Moon's penal settlement, we've got to account for Axelson."

"Yes, Sir."

"We can't guess how he got those gold-ships that returned with neon and argon for the Moon colonists. But he mustn't get us. Let the men understand that. That's all."

"Very good, Sir."

The teleradio suddenly began to splutter: A-A-A, it called. And instantly every sound ceased about the landing-stage. For that was the call of Axelson, somewhere upon the Moon.

"Axelson speaking. At the next full moon all the American Province of the World Federation will be annihilated, as the Chinese Province was at the last. There's no hope for you, good people. Send out your vacuum liners. I can use a few more of them. Within six months your world will be depopulated, unless you flash me the signal of surrender."

Would the proud old Earth have to come to that? Daily those ominous threats had been repeated, until popular fears had become frenzy. And Nat was being sent out as a last hope. If he failed, there would be nothing but surrender to this man, armed with a super-force that enabled him to lay waste the Earth from the Moon.

Within one hour, those invisible, death-dealing rays had destroyed everything that inhaled oxygen and exhaled carbon. The ray with which the liner was equipped was a mere toy in comparison. It would kill at no more than 500 miles, and its action was quite different.

As a prelude to Earth's surrender, Axelson demanded that World Presi-

dent Stark and a score of other dignitaries should depart for the Moon as hostages. Every ray fortress in the world was to be dismantled, every treasury was to send its gold to be piled up in a great pyramid on the New York landing-stage. The Earth was to acknowledge Axelson as its supreme master.

THE iron claws were turning with a screwlike motion, extending themselves, and slowly raising the interplanetary vessel until she looked like a great metal fish with metal legs ending with suckerlike disks. But already she was floating free as the softly purring engines held her in equipoise. Nat climbed the short ladder that led to her deck. Brent came up to him again.

"That teleradio message from Axelson—" he began.

"Yes?" Nat snapped out.

"I don't believe it came from the Moon at all."

"You don't? You think it's somebody playing a hoax on Earth? You think that wiping out of China was just an Earth-joke?"

"No, Sir." Brent stood steady under his superior's sarcasm. "But I was chief teleradio operator at Greenwich before being promoted to the Province of America. And what they don't know at Greenwich they don't know anywhere."

Brent spoke with that self-assurance of the born cockney that even the centuries had failed to remove, though they had removed the cockney accent.

"Well, Brent?"

"I was with the chief electrician in the receiving station when Axelson was radioing last week. And I noticed that the waves of sound were under a slight Doppler effect. With the immense magnification necessary for transmitting from the Moon, such deflection might be construed as a mere fan-like extension. But there was ten times the magnification one would expect from the Moon; and I calculated that those sound-waves were shifted somewhere."

"Then what's your theory, Brent?"

"Those sounds come from another planet. Somewhere on the Moon there's an intercepting and re-transmitting plant. Axelson is deflecting his rays to give the impression that he's on the Moon, and to lure our ships there."

"What do you advise?" asked Nat.

"I don't know, Sir."

"Neither do I. Set your course Moonward, and tell Mr. Benson to keep his eyes peeled."

THE Moon Colony, discovered in 1976, when Kramer, of Baltimore, first proved the practicability of mixing neon with the inert new gas, leucon, and so conquering gravitation, had proved to be just what it had been suspected of being—a desiccated, airless desolation. Nevertheless, within the depths of the craters a certain amount of the Moon's ancient atmosphere still lingered, sufficient to sustain life for the queer troglodytes, with enormous lung-boxes, who survived there, browsing like beasts upon the stunted, aloe-like vegetation.

Half man, half ape, and very much unlike either, these vestiges of a species on a ruined globe had proved tractable and amenable to discipline. They had become the laborers of the convict settlement that had sprung up on the Moon.

Thither all those who had opposed the establishment of the World Federation, together with all persons convicted for the fourth time of a felony, had been transported, to superintend the efforts of these dumb, unhuman Moon dwellers. For it had been discovered that the Moon craters were extraordinarily rich in gold, and gold was still the medium of exchange on Earth.

To supplement the vestigial atmosphere, huge stations had been set up, which extracted the oxygen from the subterranean waters five miles below the Moon's crust, and recombined it

with the nitrogen with which the surface layer was impregnated, thus creating an atmosphere which was pumped to the workers.

Then a curious discovery had been made. It was impossible for human beings to exist without the addition of those elements existing in the air in minute quantities—neon, krypton, and argon. And the ships that brought the gold bars back from the Moon had conveyed these gaseous elements there.

THE droning of the sixteen atomic motors grew louder, and mingled with the hum of gyroscopes. The ladder was drawn up and the port hole sealed. On the enclosed bridge Nat threw the switch of durobronze that released the non-conducting shutter which gave play to the sixteen great magnets. Swiftly the great ship shot forward into the air. The droning of the motors became a shrill whine, and then, growing too shrill for human ears to follow it, gave place to silence.

Nat set the speed lever to five hundred miles an hour, the utmost that had been found possible in passing through the earth's atmosphere, owing to the resistance, which tended to heat the vessel and damage the delicate atomic engines. As soon as the ether was reached, the speed would be increased to ten or twelve thousand. That meant a twenty-two hour run to the Moon Colony—about the time usually taken.

He pressed a lever, which set bells ringing in all parts of the ship. By means of a complicated mechanism, the air was exhausted from each compartment in turn, and then replaced, and as the bells rang, the men at work trooped out of these compartments consecutively. This had been originated for the purpose of destroying any life dangerous to man that might unwittingly have been imported from the Moon, but on one occasion it had resulted in the discovery of a stowaway.

Then Nat descended the bridge to the upper deck. Here, on a platform, were the two batteries of three ray-guns apiece, mounted on swivels, and firing in any direction on the port and starboard sides respectively. The guns were enclosed in a thin sheath of osmium, through which the lethal rays penetrated unchanged; about them, thick shields of lead protected the gunners.

He talked with Benson for a while. "Don't let Axelson get the jump on you," he said. "Be on the alert every moment." The gunners, keen-looking men, graduates from the Annapolis gunnery school, grinned and nodded. They were proud of their trade and its traditions; Nat felt that the vessel was safe in their hands.

The chief mate appeared at the head of the companion, accompanied by a girl. "Stowaway, Sir," he reported laconically. "She tumbled out of the repair shop annex when we let out the air!"

NAT stared at her in consternation, and the girl stared back at him. She was a very pretty girl, hardly more than twenty-two or three, attired in a businesslike costume consisting of a leather jacket, knickers, and the black spiral puttees that had come into style in the past decade. She came forward unabashed.

"Well, who are you?" snapped Nat.

"Madge Dawes, of the Universal News Syndicate," she answered, laughing.

"The devil!" muttered Nat. "You people think you run the World Federation since you got President Stark elected."

"We certainly do," replied the girl, still laughing.

"Well, you don't run this ship," said Nat. "How would you like a long parachute drop back to Earth?"

"Don't be foolish, my dear man," said Madge. "Don't you know you'll get wrinkles if you scowl like that? Smile! Ah, that's better. Now, honestly, Cap we just had to get the jump on every-

body else in interviewing Axelson. It means such a lot to me."

Pouts succeeded smiles. "You're not going to be cross about it, are you?" she pleaded.

"Do you realize the risk you're running, young woman?" Nat demanded. "Are you aware that our chances of ever getting back to Earth are smaller than you ought to have dreamed of taking?"

"Oh, that's all right," the girl responded. "And now that we're friends again, would you mind asking the steward to get me something to eat? I've been cooped up in that room downstairs for fifteen hours, and I'm simply starving."

Nat shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. He turned to the chief mate. "Take Miss Dawes down to the saloon and see that Wang Ling supplies her with a good meal," he ordered. "And put her in the Admiral's cabin. That good enough for you?" he asked satirically.

"Oh that'll be fine," answered the girl enthusiastically. "And I shall rely on you to keep me posted about everything that's going on. And a little later I'm going to take X-ray photographs of you and all these men." She smiled at the grinning gunners. "That's the new fad, you know, and we're going to offer prizes for the best developed skeletons in the American Province, and pick a King and Queen of Beauty!"

"A RADIO, Sir!"

Nat, who had snatched a brief interval of sleep, started up as the man on duty handed him the message. The vessel had been constantly in communication with Earth during her voyage, now nearing completion, but the dreaded A-A-A that prefaced this message told Nat that it came from Axelson.

"Congratulations on your attempt," the message ran, "I have watched your career with the greatest interest, Lee, through the medium of such scraps of information as I have been able to pick up on the Moon. When you are my guest to-morrow I shall hope to be able to offer you a high post in the new World Government that I am planning to establish. I need good men. Fraternally, the Black Caesar."

Nat whirled about. Madge Dawes was standing behind him, trying to read the message over his shoulder.

"Spying, eh?" said Nat bitterly.

"My dear man, isn't that my business?"

"Well, read this, then," said Nat, handing her the message. "You're likely to repent this crazy trick of yours before we get much farther."

And he pointed to the cosmic-ray skiagraph of the Moon on the curved glass dome overhead. They were approaching the satellite rapidly. It filled the whole dome, the craters great black hollows, the mountains standing out clearly. Beneath the dome were the radium apparatus that emitted the rays by which the satellite was photographed cinematographically, and the gyroscope steering apparatus by which the ship's course was directed.

Suddenly a buzzer sounded a warning. Nat sprang to the tube.

"Gravitational interference X40, gyroscopic aberrancy one minute 29," he called. "Discharge static electricity from hull. Mr. Benson, stand by."

"What does that mean?" asked Madge.

"It means I shall be obliged if you'll abstain from speaking to the man at the controls," snapped Nat.

"And what's that?" cried Madge in a shriller voice, pointing upward.

ACROSS the patterned surface of the Moon, shown on the skiagraph, a black, cigar-shaped form was passing. It looked like one of the old-fashioned dirigibles, and the speed with which it moved was evident from the fact that it was perceptibly traversing the Moon's surface. Perhaps it was travelling at the rate of fifty thousand miles an hour.

Brent, the chief officer, burst up the companion. His face was livid.

"Black ship approaching us from the Moon, Sir," he stammered. "Benson's training his guns, but it must be twenty thousands miles away."

"Yes, even our ray-guns won't shoot that distance," answered Nat. "Tell Benson to keep his guns trained as well as he can, and open fire at five hundred."

Brent disappeared. Madge and Nat were alone on the bridge. Nat was shouting incomprehensible orders down the tube. He stopped and looked up. The shadow of the approaching ship had crossed the Moon's disk and disappeared.

"Well, young lady, I think your goose is cooked," said Nat. "If I'm not mistaken, that ship is Axelson's, and he's on his way to knock us galley-west. And now oblige me by leaving the bridge."

"I think he's a perfectly delightful character, to judge from that message he sent you," answered Madge, "and—"

Brent appeared again. "Triangulation shows ten thousand miles, Sir," he informed Nat.

"Take control," said Nat. "Keep on the gyroscopic course, allowing for aberrancy, and make for the Crater of Pytho. I'll take command of the guns." He hurried down the companion, with Madge at his heels.

THE gunners stood by the ray-guns, three at each, Benson perched on a revolving stool above the batteries. He was watching a periscopic instrument that connected with the bridge dome by means of a tube, a flat mirror in front of him showing all points of the compass. At one edge the shadow of the black ship was creeping slowly forward.

"Eight thousand miles, Sir," he told Nat. "One thousand is our extreme range. And it looks as if she's making for our blind spot overhead."

Nat stepped to the speaking-tube. "Try to ram her," he called up to Brent. "We'll open with all guns, pointing forward."

"Very good, Sir," the Cockney called back.

The black shadow was now nearly in the centre of the mirror. It moved upward, vanished. Suddenly the atomic motors began wheezing again. The wheeze became a whine, a drone.

"We've dropped to two thousand miles an hour, Sir," called Brent.

Nat leaped for the companion. As he reached the top he could hear the teleradio apparatus in the wireless room overhead begin to chatter:

"A-A-A. Don't try to interfere. Am taking you to the Crater of Pytho. Shall renew my offer there. Any resistance will be fatal. Axelson."

And suddenly the droning of the motors became a whine again, then silence. Nat stared at the instrument-board and uttered a cry.

"What's the matter?" demanded Madge.

Nat swung upon her. "The matter?" he bawled. "He's neutralized our engines by some infernal means of his own, and he's towing us to the Moon!"

THE huge sphere of the Moon had long since covered the entire dome. The huge Crater of Pytho now filled it, a black hollow fifty miles across, into which they were gradually settling. And, as they settled, the pale Earth light, white as that of the Moon on Earth, showed the gaunt masses of bare rock, on which nothing grew, and the long stalactites of glassy lava that hung from them.

Then out of the depths beneath emerged the shadowy shape of the landing-stage.

"You are about to land," chattered the radio. "Don't try any tricks; they will be useless. Above all, don't try to use your puny ray. You are helpless."

The ship was almost stationary. Little figures could be seen swarming upon the landing-stage, ready to adjust the iron claws to clamp the hull. With a gesture of helplessness, Nat

left the bridge and went down to the main deck where, in obedience to his orders, the crew had all assembled.

"Men, I'm putting it up to you," he said. "Axelson, the Black Caesar, advises us not to attempt to use the Rayguns. I won't order you to. I'll leave the decision with you."

"We tried it fifteen minutes ago, Sir," answered Benson. "I told Larrigan to fire off the stern starboard gun to see if it was in working order, and it wasn't!"

At that moment the vessel settled with a slight jar into the clamps. Once more the teleradio began to scream:

"Open the port hold and file out slowly. Resistance is useless. I should turn my ray upon you and obliterate you immediately. Assemble on the landing-stage and wait for me!"

"You'd best obey," Nat told his men. "We've got a passenger to consider." He glared at Madge as he spoke, and Madge's smile was a little more tremulous than it had been before.

"This is the most thrilling experience of my life, Captain Lee," she said. "And I'll never rest until I've got an X-Ray photograph of Mr. Axelson's skeleton for the Universal News Syndicate."

ONE by one, Nat last, the crew filed down the ladder onto the landing-stage, gasping and choking in the rarefied air that lay like a blanket at the bottom of the crater. And the reason for this was only too apparent to Nat as soon as he was on the level stage.

Overhead, at an altitude of about a mile, the black ship hung, and from its bow a stupendous searchlight played to and fro over the bottom of the crater, making it as light as day. And where had been the mining machinery, the great buildings that had housed convicts and Moon people, and the huge edifice that contained the pumping station, there was—nothing.

The devilish ray of Axelson had not merely destroyed them, it had obliterated all traces of them, and the crew of the liner were breathing the remnants of the atmosphere that still lay at the bottom of the Crater of Pytho.

But beside the twin landing-stages, constructed by the World Federation, another building arose, with an open front. And that front was a huge mirror, now scintillating under the searchlight from the black ship.

"That's it, Sir!" shouted Brent.

"That's what?" snapped Nat.

"The deflecting mirror I was speaking of. That's what deflected the ray that wiped out China. The ray didn't come from the Moon. And that's the mirror that deflects the teleradio waves, the super-Hertzian rays that carry the sound."

Nat did not answer. Sick at heart at the failure of his mission, he was watching the swarm of Moon men who were at work upon the landing-stage, turning the steel clamps and regulating the mechanism that controlled the apparatus. Dwarfed, apish creatures, with tiny limbs, and chests that stood out like barrels, they bustled about, chattering in shrill voices that seemed like the piping of birds.

It was evident that Axelson, though he had wiped out the Moon convicts and the Moon people in the crater, had reserved a number of the latter for personal use.

THE black ship was dropping into its position at the second landing-stage, connected with the first by a short bridge. The starboard hold swung open, and a file of shrouded and hooded forms appeared, masked men, breathing in condensed air from receptacles upon their chests, and staring with goggle eyes at their captives. Each one held in his hand a lethal tube containing the ray, and, as if by command, they took up their stations about their prisoners.

Then, at a signal from their leader, they suddenly doffed their masks.

Nat looked at them in astonishment. He had not known whether these would be Earth denizens or inhabitants

of some other planet. But they were Earth men. And they were old.

Men of sixty or seventy years, with long, gray beards and wrinkled faces, and eyes that stared out from beneath penthouses of shaggy eyebrows. Faces on which were imprinted despair and hopelessness.

Then the first man took off his mask, and Nat saw a man of different character.

A man in the prime of life, with a mass of jet black hair and a black beard that swept to his waist, a nose like a hawk's, and a pair of dark blue eyes that fixed themselves on Nat's with a look of Luciferian pride.

"Welcome, Nathaniel Lee," said the man, in deep tones that had a curious accent which Nat could not place. "I ought to know your name, since your teleradios on Earth have been shouting it for three days past as that of the man who is to save Earth from the threat of destruction. And you know me!"

"Axelson—the Black Caesar," Nat muttered. For the moment he was taken aback. He had anticipated any sort of person except this man, who stood, looked, and spoke like a Viking, this incarnation of pride and strength.

Axelson smiled—and then his eyes lit upon Madge Dawes. And for a moment he stood as if petrified into a block of massive granite.

"What—who is this?" he growled.

"Why, I'm Madge Dawes, of the Universal News Syndicate," answered the girl, smiling at Axelson in her irrepressible manner. "And I'm sure you're not nearly such a bold, bad pirate as people think, and you're going to let us all go free."

INSTANTLY Axelson seemed to become transformed into a maniac. He turned to the old men and shouted in some incomprehensible language. Nat and Madge, Brent and Benson, and two others who wore the uniforms of officers were seized and dragged across the bridge to the landing-stage where the black ship was moored. The rest of the crew were ordered into a double line.

And then the slaughter began.

Before Nat could even struggle to break away from the gibbering Moon men to whom he and the other prisoners had been consigned, the aged crew of the Black Caesar had begun their work of almost instantaneous destruction.

Streams of red and purple light shot from the ray-pistols that they carried, and before them the crew of the etherliner simply withered up and vanished. They became mere masses of human débris piled on the landing-stage, and upon these masses, too, the old men turned their implements, until only a few heaps of charred carbon remained on the landing-stage, impalpable as burned paper, and slowly rising in the low atmospheric pressure until they drifted over the crater.

Nat had cried out in horror at the sight, and tried to tear himself free from the grasp of the Moon dwarfs who held him. So had the rest. Never was struggle so futile. Despite their short arms and legs, the Moon dwarfs held them in an unshakable grip, chattering and squealing as they compressed them against their barrel-like chests until the breath was all but crushed out of their bodies.

"Devil!" cried Nat furiously, as Axelson came up to him. "Why don't you kill us, too?" And he hurled furious taunts and abuse at him, in the hope of goading him into making the same comparatively merciless end of his prisoners.

Axelson looked at him calmly, but made no reply. He looked at Madge again, and his features were convulsed with some emotion that gave him the aspect of a fiend. And then only did Nat realize that it was Madge who was responsible for the Black Caesar's madness.

Axelson spoke again, and the prisoners were hustled up the ladder and on board the black vessel.

"THE Kommandant-Kommissar will see you!" The door of their prison had opened, letting in a shaft of light, and disclosing one of the graybeards, who stood there, pointing at Nat.

"The—who?" Nat demanded.

"The Kommandant-Kommissar, Comrade Axelson," snarled the graybeard.

Nat knew what that strange jargon meant. He had read books about the political sect known as Socialists who flourished in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, and, indeed, were even yet not everywhere extinct. And with that a flash of intuition explained the presence of these old men on board.

These were the men who had been imprisoned in their youth, with Axelson's father, and had escaped and made their way into space, and had been supposed dead long since. Somewhere they must have survived.

And here they were, speaking a jargon of past generations, and ignorant that the world had changed, relics of the past, dead as the dead Moon from which the black ship was winging away through the ether.

"Don't go, Captain," pleaded Madge. "Tell him we'll all go together."

Nat shook his head. "Maybe I'll be able to make terms with him," he answered, and stepped out upon the vessel's deck.

The graybeard slammed the door and laughed savagely. "You'll make no terms with the Black Caesar," he said. "This is the reign of the proletariat. The bourgeois must die! So Lenin decreed!"

But he stopped suddenly and passed his hand over his forehead like a man awakening from a dream.

"Surely the proletariat has already triumphed on earth?" he asked. "A long time has passed, and daily we expect the summons to return and establish the new world-order. What year is this? Is it not 2017? It is so hard to reckon on Eros."

"On Eros?" thought Nat. "This is the year 2044," he answered. "You've been dreaming, my friend. We've had our new world-order, and it's not in the least like the one you and your friends anticipated."

"Gott!" screamed the old man. "Gott, you're lying to me, bourgeois! You're lying, I tell you!"

SO Eros was their destination! Eros, one of the asteroids, those tiny fragments of a broken planet, lying outside the orbit of Mars. Some of these little worlds, of which more than a thousand are known to exist, are no larger than a gentleman's country estate; some are mere rocks in space. Eros, Nat knew, was distinguished among them from the fact that it had an eccentric orbit, which brought it at times nearer Earth than any other heavenly body except the Moon.

Also that it had only been known for thirty years, and that it was supposed to be a double planet, having a dark companion.

That was in Nat's mind as he ascended the bridge to where Axelson was standing at the controls, with one of the graybeards beside him. The door of his stateroom was open, and suddenly there scuttled out of it one of the most bestial objects Nat had ever seen.

It was a Moon woman, a dwarfish figure, clothed in a shapeless garment of spun cellulose, and in her arms she held a heavy-headed Moon baby, whose huge chest stood up like a pyramid, while the tiny arms and legs hung dangling down.

"Here is the bourgeois, Kommandant," said Nat's captor.

Axelson looked at Nat, eye meeting eye in a slow stare. Then he relinquished the controls to the graybeard beside him, and motioned Nat to precede him into the stateroom.

Nat entered. It was an ordinary room, much like that of the captain of the ether-liner now stranded on the Moon. There were a bunk, chairs, a desk and a radio receiver.

Axelson shut the door. He tried to

speak and failed to master his emotion. At last he said:

"I am prepared to offer you terms, Nathaniel Lee, in accordance with my promise."

"I'll make no terms with murderers," replied Nat bitterly.

AXELSON stood looking at him. His great chest rose and fell. Suddenly he put out one great hand and clapped Nat on the shoulder.

"Wise men," he said, "recognize facts. Within three weeks I shall be the undisputed ruler of Earth. Whether of a desert or of a cowed and submissive subject-population, rests with the Earth men. I have never been on Earth, for I was born on Eros. My mother died at my birth. I have never seen another human woman until to-day."

Nat looked at him, trying to follow what was in Axelson's mind.

"My father fled to Eros, a little planet seventeen miles in diameter, as we have found. He called it a heavenly paradise. It was his intention to found there a colony of those who were in rebellion against the tyrants of Earth.

"His followers journeyed to the Moon and brought back Moon women for wives. But there were no children of these unions. Later there were dissensions and civil war. Three-fourths of the colony died in battle with one another.

"I was a young man. I seized the reins of power. The survivors—these old men—were disillusioned and docile. I made myself absolute. I brought Moon men and women to Eros to serve us as slaves. But in a few years the last of my father's old compatriots will have died, and thus it was I conceived of conquering Earth and having men to obey me. For fifteen years I have been experimenting and constructing apparatus, with which I now have Earth at my mercy.

"But I shall need assistance, intelligent men who will obey me and aid me in my plans. That is why I saved you and the other officers of your etherlines. If you will join me, you shall have the highest post on Earth under me, Nathaniel Lee, and those others shall be under you."

AXELSON paused, and, loathing the man though he did, Nat was conscious of a feeling of pity for him that he could not control. He saw his lonely life on Eros, surrounded by those phantom humans of the past, and he understood his longing for Earth rule—he the planetary exile, the sole human being of all the planetary system outside Earth, perhaps, except for his dwindling company of aged men.

"To-day, Nathaniel Lee," Axelson went on, "my life was recast in a new mould when I saw the woman you have brought with you. I did not know before that women were beautiful to look on. I did not dream that creatures such as she existed. She must be mine, Nathaniel Lee.

"But that is immaterial. What is your answer to my offer?"

Nat was trying to think, though passion distorted the mental images as they arose in his brain. To Axelson it was evidently incomprehensible that there would be any objection to his taking Madge. Nat saw that he must temporize for Madge's sake.

"I'll have to consult my companions," he answered.

"Of course," answered Axelson. "That is reasonable. Tell them that unless they agree to join me it will be necessary for them to die. Do Earth men mind death? We hate it on Eros, and the Moon men hate it, too, though they have a queer legend that something in the shape of an invisible man raises from their ashes. My father told me that that superstition existed on Earth in his time, too. Go and talk to your companions, Nathaniel Lee."

The Black Caesar's voice was almost friendly. He clapped Nat on the shoulder again, and called the graybeard to conduct him back to his prison.

"Oh, Captain Lee, I'm so glad you're back!" exclaimed Madge. "We've been afraid for you. Is he such a terrible man, this Black Caesar?"

Nat sneezed, then grinned malevolently. "Well, he's not exactly the old-fashioned idea of a Sunday-school teacher," he answered. Of course he could not tell the girl about Axelson's proposal.

THE little group of prisoners stood on the uuper deck of the black ship and watched the Moon men scurrying about the landing-stage as she hovered to her position.

Axelson's father had not erred when he had called the tiny planet, Eros, a heavenly paradise, for no other term could have described it.

They were in an atmosphere so similar to that of Earth that they could breathe with complete freedom, but there seemed to be a lightness and a vigor in their limbs that indicated that the air was supercharged with oxygen or ozone. The presence of this in large amounts was indicated by the intense blueness of the sky, across which fleecy clouds were drifting.

And in that sky what looked like threescore moons were circling with extraordinary swiftness. From thirty to forty full moons, of all sizes, from that of a sun to that of a brilliant planet, and riding black against the blue.

The sun, hardly smaller than when seen from Earth, shone in the zenith, and Earth and Mars hung in the east and north respectively, each like a blood-red sun.

The moons were some of the thousand other asteroids, weaving their lacy patterns in and out among each other. But, stupendous as the sight was, it was toward the terrestrial scene that the party turned their eyes as the black ship settled.

A sea of sapphire blue lapped sands of silver and broke into soft lines of foam. To the water's edge extended a lawn of brightest green, and behind this an arm of the sea extended into what looked like a tropical forest. Most of the trees were palmlike, but towered to immense heights, their foliage swaying in a gentle breeze. There were apparently no elevations, and yet, so small was the little sphere that the ascending curve gave the illusion of distant heights, while the horizon, instead of seeming to rise, lay apparently perfectly flat, producing an extraordinary feeling of insecurity.

Near the water's edge a palatial mansion, built of hewn logs and of a single story, stood in a garden of brilliant flowers. Nearer, beyond the high landing-stage, were the great shipbuilding works, and near them an immense and slightly concave mirror flashed back the light of the sun.

"The death ray!" whispered Brent to Nat.

Axelson came up to the party as the ship settled down. "Welcome to Eros," he said cordially. "My father told me that in some Earth tongue that name meant 'love'."

NEVER, perhaps, was so strange a feast held as that with which Axelson entertained his guests that day. Dwarfish Moon men passed viands and a sort of palm wine in the great banquet-room, which singularly resembled one of those early twentieth century interiors shown in museums. Only the presence of a dozen of the aged guards, armed with ray-rods, lent a grimness to the scene.

Madge sat on Axelson's right, and Nat on his left. The girl's lightheartedness had left her; her face grew strained as Axelson's motives—which Nat had not dared disclose to her—disclosed themselves in his manner.

Once, when he laid his finger for a moment against her white throat, she started, and for a moment it seemed as if the gathering storm must break.

For Nat had talked with his men, and all had agreed that they would not turn traitor, though they intended to temporize as long as possible, in the

hope of catching the Black Caesar unawares.

Then slowly a somber twilight began to fall, and Axelson rose.

"Let us walk in the gardens during the reign of Erebos," he said.

"Erebos?" asked Nat.

"The black world that overshadows us each sleeping period," answered Axelson.

Nat knew what he meant. The dark companion of Eros revolves around it every six hours; the day of Eros would therefore never be longer than six hours, this without reckoning the revolution of Eros around the sun. But owing to its small size, it was probable that it was bathed in almost perpetual sunshine.

The sweet scent of the flowers, much stronger than of any flowers on earth, filled the air. They walked across the green lawn and entered a jungle path, with bamboos and creeping plants on either side, and huge palmlike trees. Behind them stalked the guards with their ray-rods.

A lake of deepest black disclosed itself. Suddenly Madge uttered a scream and clung to Nat. "Look, look!" she cried. "It's horrible!"

SUDDENLY Nat realized that the lake swarmed with monsters. They were of crocodilian form, but twice the size of the largest crocodile, and sprawled over one another in the shallows beside the margin. As the party drew near, an enormous monster began waddling on its clawed feet toward them.

A mouth half the length of the creature opened, disclosing a purplish tongue and hideous fangs. Madge screamed again.

"Ah, so fear exists on Earth, too?" asked Axelson blandly. "That makes my conquest sure. I suspected it, and yet I was not sure that science had not conquered it. But there is no cause for fear. A magnetic field protects us. See!"

For the waddling monster suddenly stopped short as if brought up sharply by the bars of a cage, and drew back.

Axelson turned and wheezed in the Moon language—if the gibbering of the dwarfs could be called speech—and one of the guards answered him.

"These primitive dwellers on Eros I have preserved," said Axelson, "as a means of discipline. The Moon animals are afraid of them. I keep a supply of those who have transgressed my laws to feed them. See!"

He turned and pointed. Two guards were bringing a gibbering, screeching, struggling Moon man with them. Despite his strength, he seemed incapable of making any resistance, but his whole body quivered, and his hideous face was contorted with agony of terror.

At a distance of some fifty feet they turned aside into a little bypath through the jungle, reappearing close beside the lake upon a raised platform. And what happened next happened so swiftly that Nat was unable to do anything to prevent it.

The guards disappeared; the Moon man, as if propelled by some invisible force, moved forward jerkily to the lake's edge. Instantly one of the saurians had seized him in its jaws, and another had wrenched half the body away, and the whole fighting, squirming mass vanished in the depths.

And from far away came the screeching chant of the Moon men, as if in invocation to some hideous deity.

And, moving perceptibly, the huge black orb of Eros's dark satellite crept over the sky, completely covering it.

AXELSON stepped forward to where Nat stood, supporting Madge in his arms. The girl had fainted with horror at the scene.

"Your answer, Nathaniel Lee," he said softly. "I know you have been postponing the decision. Now I will take the girl, and you shall give me your answer. Will you and these men join me, or will you die as the Moon man died?" He spoke wheezily, as if he, like Nat, had a cold.

And he put his arm around Madge.

Next moment something happened to him that had never happened in his life before. The Black Caesar went down under a well-directed blow to the jaw.

He leaped to his feet trembling with fury and barked a command. Instantly the old guards had hurled themselves forward. And behind them a horde of Moon men came ambling.

While the guards covered their prisoners with their ray-rods, two Moon men seized each of them, imprisoning him in their unbreakable grasp.

Axelson pointed upward. "When the reign of Erebos is past," he said, "you become food for the denizens of the lake, unless you have agreed to serve me."

And he raised Madge in his arms, laughing as the girl fought and struggled to resist him.

"Madge!" cried Nat, trying to run toward her.

So furious were his struggles that for a moment he succeeded in throwing off the Moon men's grasp. Then he was caught again, and, fighting desperately, was borne off by the dwarfs through the shadows.

They traversed the border of the lake until a small stone building disclosed itself. Nat and the others were thrust inside into pitch darkness. The door clanged; in vain they hurled themselves against it. It was of wood, but it was as solid as the stone itself, and it did not give an inch for all their struggles.

"WHERE is your Kommandant?" The whisper seemed in the stone hut itself. "Your Nathaniel Lee. I must speak to him. I am the guard who brought him to the Black Caesar on board the ship."

"I'm here," said Nat. "Where are you?"

"I am in the house of the ray. I am on guard there. I am speaking into the telephone which runs only to where you are. You can speak anywhere in the hut, and I shall hear you."

"Well, what do you want?" asked Nat.

"You love the Earth woman. I remember, when I was a boy, we used to love. I had forgotten. There was a girl in Stamford. Tell me, is it true that this is the year 2044, and that the proletariat has not yet triumphed?"

"It's true," said Nat. "Those dreams are finished. We're proud of the World Federation. Tell me about Madge Dawes—the Earth woman. Is she safe?"

"He has taken her to his house. I do not think she is harmed. He is ill. He is closely guarded. There are rumors afoot. I do not know."

"What do you want, then?"

"If the Black Caesar dies, will you take me back to Earth again? I long so for the old Earth life. I will be your slave, if only I can set foot on Earth before I die."

"Can you rescue us?" Nat held his breath.

"The Moon men are on guard."

"They have no ray-guns and you have."

"The penalty would be terrible. I should be thrown to the monsters."

"Can you get us each a ray-gun? Will you risk it, to get back to Earth?" asked Nat.

A pause. Then, "My friend, I am coming."

Nat heard Benson hissing in his ear, "If we can surprise them, we can get possession of the black ship and return."

"We must get Madge Dawes."

"And smash the mirror," put in Brent.

After that there was nothing to do but wait.

THE door clicked open. An indistinct form stood in the entrance. It was already growing light; the dark satellite that eclipsed Eros was passing.

"Hush! I have brought you ray-rods!" It was the old man with whom Nat had spoken on the boat. Under his

arm he held five metallic rods, tipped with luminous glass. He handed one to each of the prisoners. "Do you know how to use them?" he asked.

Nat examined his. "It's an old-style rod that was used on earth fifty years ago," he told his men. "I've seen them in museums. It came into use in the Second World War of 1950 or thereabouts. You slip back the safety catch and press this button, taking aim as one did with the pistol. You fellows have seen pistols?"

"My father had an old one," said the chief mate, Barnes.

"How many times can they be fired without reloading?" Nat asked the old guard.

"Ten times; sometimes more; and they were all freshly loaded yesterday."

"Take us to where Axelson is."

"First you must destroy the guards. I sent the one on duty here away on some pretext. But the others may be here at any moment. Talk lower. Are you going to kill them?"

"We must," said Nat.

The old fellow began to sob. "We were companions together. They seized us and imprisoned us together, the capitalists, years ago. I thought the proletariat would have won, and you say it is all different. I am an old man, and life is sad and strange."

"Listen! Is Axelson in the house?" demanded Nat.

"He is in his secret room. I do not know the way. None of us has ever entered it."

"And Madge?"

"She was with him. I do not know anything more." He sank down, groaning, broken.

NAT pushed his way past him. It was fast growing light now. A ray of sunshine shot from beneath the edge of the dark sphere overhead, which still filled almost all the heavens. At that moment the hideous face and squat body of one of the Moon men came into view at the end of the path. The creature stopped, gibbering with surprise, and then rushed forward, mewing like a cat.

Nat aimed his ray-rod and pressed the button. The streak of light, not quite aimed, in Nat's excitement, sheared off one side of the Moon man's face.

The creature rocked where it stood, raised its voice in a screech, and rushed forward again, arms flailing. And this time Nat got home. The streak passed right through the body of the monster, which collapsed into a heap of calcined carbon.

But its screech had brought the other dwarfs running to the scene. In a moment the path was blocked by a score of the hideous monsters, which, taking in what was happening, came forward in a yelling bunch.

The ray-rods streaked their message of death into the thick of them. Yet so fierce was the rush that some parts got home. Arms, legs, and barrel chests, halves of men, covering the five with that impalpable black powder into which their bodies were dissolving. Nat remembered afterward the horror of a grinning face, apparently loose in the air, and a flailing arm that lashed his chest.

For fifteen seconds, perhaps, it was like struggling with some vampire creatures in a hideous dream. And then, just when it seemed to Nat that he was going mad, he found the path free, and the huddled remnants of the Moon men piled up about him on every side.

He emptied two more ray-shots into the writhing mass, and saw it cease to quiver and then dissolve into the black powder. He turned and looked at his companions. They, too, showed the horror of the strain they had undergone.

"We must kill the guards now," Nat panted. "And then find Madge and save her."

"We're with you," answered Brent, and together the five rushed into the sunlight and the open.

THERE were no guards on duty at the entrance of the house, and the door stood wide open. Nat rushed through the door at the head of his men. A single guard was in the hall, but he only looked up as they came in. And it was evident that he was in no condition to resist, for he was in the grip of some terrible disease.

His features were swollen so that they were hardly recognizable, and hoarse, panting breaths came from his lungs. He was so far gone that he hardly registered surprise at the advent of the five.

"Where's Axelson?" demanded Nat.

The guard pointed toward the end of the corridor, then let his arm fall. Nat led his men along the half-dark passage.

At the end of the corridor two more guards were on duty, but one was collapsed upon the floor, apparently unconscious, and the other, making a feeble attempt to draw his ray-rod, crumbled into ashes as Brent fired. The five burst through the door.

They found themselves in the banquet-hall. The remnants of the meal were still upon the table, and three Moon men, looking as if they had been poisoned, were writhing on the floor. At the farther end of the hall was another door.

This gave upon a central hall, with a door in each of its four sides, and a blaze of sunlight coming through the crystal roof. The five stopped, baffled. Then of a sudden Axelson's voice broke the silence—his voice, yet changed almost beyond recognition, hoarse, broken, and gasping:

"Try the doors, Nathaniel Lee. Try each door in turn, and then go back. And know that in an instant I can blast you to nothingness where you stand!"

And suddenly there came Madge's voice, "He can't! He can't, Nat. He's dying, and he knows it. I won't let him, and he hasn't got the strength to move."

"Which door?" cried Nat in desparation.

"None of the doors. They're a trick," came Madge's voice. "Go forward and press the grooved panel upon the wall in front of you."

NAT stepped forward, found the panel, and pressed it. The wall swung open, like two folded doors, revealing another room within, perfectly circular.

It contained a quantity of pieces of apparatus, some glowing with light, some dark, and a radio transmitting set; it was evidently the secret lair of the Black Caesar. And there he was, trapped at last by the mortal illness that had overtaken him!

He was lying upon the couch, his great form stretched out, his features hideously swollen by the same disease that had attacked the guards.

Nat raised his ray-rod, but Axelson feebly put up his hand, and Nat lowered the weapon. And, as the five gathered about the dying man, again Nat felt that strange sense of pathos and pity for him.

He had never known Earth life, and he was not to be measured by the common standards applicable on Earth.

"Don't fire, Nat," said Madge in a shaky voice. She was seated beside Axelson, and—the wonder of it—she was sponging the foam from his lips and moistening his forehead. She raised a crystal that contained some fluid to his lips, and he drained it greedily.

"So—Earth wins, Nathaniel Lee," whispered Axelson hoarsely. "I am dying. I know it. It is the same dreaded disease that came to the Moon at the time of my father's landing there. Three-fourths of the Moon animals died. It is mortal. The lungs burn away.

"My father told me that on Earth it is not mortal. He called it 'cold'—but I am burning hot."

Then only did Nat understand, and the irony of it made him catch his breath and grit his teeth to check his hysterical laughter. The Black Caesar,

the terror of Earth, was dying of a common cold which he himself had given him.

The coryza germ, almost harmless on Earth, among a population habituated to it for countless generations, had assumed the potency of a plague here, where no colds had ever been known—among the Moon men, and even among the guards, after their lifetime in the germless climate of Eros.

"I've failed, Nathaniel Lee," came the Black Caesar's voice. "And yet that hardly troubles me. There is something more that I do not understand. She is a creature like ourselves—with will and reason. She is not like the Moon women. She told me that she did not wish to be queen of the Earth because she did not love me. I do not understand. And so—I am glad to go."

A GASP came from Axelson's throat as he raised his head and tried to speak, but the death-rattle was already in his throat. A slight struggle, and the massive form upon the couch was nothing but inanimate clay.

Madge rose from beside him, and the tears were streaming down her face.

"He wasn't a bad man, Nat," she said. "He was—gentle with me. He didn't understand; that was all. When I refused to be his queen, he was overcome with bewilderment. Oh, Nat, I can never, never write this story for the Universal News Syndicate."

Nat led her, sobbing, from the room.

Soon he succeeded in getting into teleradio communication with Earth. He broadcast the news that the Black Caesar was dead, and that his power for evil was at an end forever.

Then, in the few hours of daylight that remained, he set his men to work to smash the ray outfit that had destroyed China. There was some principle involved which he did not altogether understand, though Brent professed to have a clue to it, but it was evident that, except for the ray, Axelson had possessed no knowledge superior to that of the Earth scientists.

Of the guards, a few were already recovering, principally those of comparatively younger age. Not a Moon man, on the other hand, had survived the epidemic. As soon as Nat had got the guards out of the house, he reduced it to ashes by the aid of an old-fashioned box of phosphoric matches.

As the dark satellite was again creeping over Eros, the black ship set sail.

BUT of the return journey to the Moon, where they transferred to their own ship, of their landing at New York, and of the triumphal reception that was accorded them, this is no place to speak. Nat's journey with Madge from the center of the city, in what was the old Borough of Westchester, to his home in the suburb of Hartford, was a continual ovation.

Crowds lined the air-route, and every few miles, so thick was the air-traffic, he was forced to hover and address the cheering multitudes. Hartford itself was *en fete*, and across the main road the City Bosses had hung an old-fashioned banner, strung from house to house on either side, bearing the legend: For World President: NATHANIEL LEE!

Nat turned to Madge, who was seated beside him silently. "Ever hear of 'getting married?'" he asked.

"Of course I've heard of it," replied the girl indignantly. "Do you think I'm as dumb as that, Nat Lee? Why, those old-fashioned novels are part of the public schools' curriculum."

"Pity those days can't come back. You ought to be a World Presidentess, you know," said Nat. "I was thinking if we registered as companionates, I could take you into the White House, and you'd have a swell time there taking X-rays on visiting days."

"Well," answered Madge slowly, "I never thought of that. It might be worth trying out."

The city of the frog-men!

The Second Satellite

By Edmond Hamilton

Earth-men war on frog-vampires for the emancipation of the human cows of Earth's second satellite.

NORMAN and Hackett, bulky in their thick flying suits, seemed to fill the little office. Across the room Harding, the field superintendent, contemplated them. Two planes were curving up into the dawn together from the field outside, their motors thunderous as they roared over the building. When their clamor had receded, Harding spoke:

"I don't know which of you two is crazier," he said. "You, Norman, to propose a fool trip like this, or you, Hackett, to go with him."

Hackett grinned, but the long, lean face of Norman was earnest. "No doubt it all sounds a little insane," he said, "but I'm convinced I'm right."

The field superintendent shook his head. "Norman, you ought to be writing fiction instead of flying. A second satellite—and Fellows and the others on it—what the devil!"

"What other theory can account for their disappearance?" asked Norman calmly. "You know that since the new X-type planes were introduced, hundreds of fliers all over Earth have been trying for altitude records in them. Twenty-five miles — thirty — thirty-five — the records have been

broken every day. But out of the hundreds of fliers who have gone up to those immense heights, four have never come down nor been seen again!

"One vanished over northern Sweden, one over Australia, one over Lower California, and one, Fellows, himself, right here over Long Island. You saw the globe on which I marked those four spots, and you saw that when connected they formed a perfect circle around the Earth. The only explanation is that the four fliers when they reached a forty-mile height were caught up by some body moving round Earth in that circular orbit, some unknown moon circling Earth inside its atmosphere, a second satellite of Earth's whose existence has until now never been suspected!"

HARDING shook his head again. "Norman, your theory would be all right if it were not for the cold fact that no such satellite has ever been glimpsed."

"Can you glimpse a bullet passing you?" Norman retorted. "The two fliers at Sweden and Lower California vanished within three hours of each other, on opposite sides of the Earth. That means that this second satellite, as I've computed, circles Earth once every six hours, and travelling at that terrific speed it is no more visible to us of Earth than a rifle bullet would be."

"Moving through Earth's atmosphere at such speed, indeed, one would expect it to burn up by its own friction with the air. But it does not, because its own gravitational power would draw to itself enough air to make a dense little atmosphere for itself that would cling to it and shield it as it speeds through Earth's upper air. No, I'm certain that this second satellite exists, Harding, and I'm as certain that it's responsible for the vanishing of those four fliers."

"And now you and Hackett have figured when it will be passing over here and are going up in an X-type yourselves to look for it," Harding said musingly.

"Look for it?" echoed Hackett. "We're not going to climb forty miles just to get a look at the damn thing—we're going to try landing on it!"

"You're crazy sure!" the field superintendent exploded. "If Fellows and those others got caught by the thing and never came down again, why in the name of all that's holy would you two want—" He stopped suddenly. "Oh, I think I see," he said, awkwardly. "Fellows was rather a buddy of you two, wasn't he?"

"The best that ever flew a crippled Nieuport against three Fokkers to pull us out of a hole," said Norman softly. "Weeks he's been gone, and if it had been Hackett and I he'd be all over the sky looking for us—the damned lunatic. Well, we're not going to let him down."

"I see," Harding repeated. Then—"Well, here comes your mechanic, Norman, so your ship must be ready. I'll go with you. It's an event to see two Columbuses starting for another world."

THE gray dawn-light over the flying field was flushing to faint rose as the three strode out to where the long X-type stood, its strangely curved wings, enclosed cabin and flat, fanlike tail gleaming dully. Its motor was already roaring with power and the plane's stubby wheels strained against the chocks. In their great suits Norman and Hackett were like two immense ape-figures in the uncertain light, to the eyes of those about them.

"Well, all the luck," Harding told them. "You know I'm pulling for you, but—I suppose it's useless to say anything about being careful."

"I seem to have heard the words," Hackett grinned, as he and Norman shook the field superintendent's hand.

"It's all the craziest chance," Norman told the other. "And if we don't come down in a reasonable time—well, you'll know that our theory was right, and

you can broadcast it or not as you please."

"I hope for your sake that you're dead wrong," smiled the official. "I've told you two to get off the Earth a lot of times, but I never meant it seriously."

Harding stepped back as the two clambered laboriously into the cramped cabin. Norman took the controls, the door slammed, and as the chocks were jerked back and the motor roared louder the long plane curved up at a dizzy angle from the field into the dawn. Hackett waved a thick arm down toward the diminishing figures on the field below; then turned from the window to peer ahead with his companion.

The plane flew in a narrow ascending spiral upward, at an angle that would have been impossible to any ship save an X-type. Norman's eyes roved steadily over the instrument as they rose, his ears unconsciously alert for each explosion of the motor. Earth receded swiftly into a great gray concave surface as they climbed higher and higher.

By the time the five-mile height was reached Earth's surface had changed definitely from concave to convex. The plane was ascending by then in a somewhat wider spiral, but its climb was as steady and sure as ever. Frost began to form quickly on the cabin's windows, creeping out from the edges. Norman spoke a word over the motor's muffled thunder, and Hackett snicked on the electrical radiators. The frost crept back as their warm, clean heat flooded the cabin.

Ten miles—fifteen—they had reached already altitudes impossible but a few years before, though it was nothing to the X-types. As they passed the ten-mile mark, Hackett set the compact oxygen-generator going. A clean, tangy odor filled the cabin as it began functioning. Twenty miles—twenty-two—

AFTER a time Norman pointed mutely to the clock on the instrument board, and Hackett nodded. They were well within their time schedule, having calculated to reach the forty-mile height at ten, the hour when, by its computed orbit, the second satellite should be passing overhead. "—26—27—28—" Hackett muttered the altimeter figures to himself as the needle crept over them.

Glancing obliquely down through the window he saw that Earth was now a huge gray ball beneath them, white cloud-oceans obscuring the drab details of its surface here and there. "—31—32—" The plane was climbing more slowly, and at a lesser angle. Even the X-type had to struggle to rise in the attenuated air now about them. Only the super-light, super-powered plane could ever have reached the terrific height.

It was at the thirty-four mile level that the real battle for altitude began. Norman kept the plane curving steadily upward, handling it with surpassing skill in the rarefied air. Frost was on its windows now despite the heating mechanism. Slowly the altimeter needle crept to the forty mark. Norman kept the ship circling, its wings tilted slightly, but not climbing, Earth a great gray misty ball beneath.

"Can't keep this height long," he jerked. "If our second satellite doesn't show up in minutes we've had a trip for nothing."

"All seems mighty different up here," was Hackett's shouted comment. "Easy enough to talk down there about hopping onto the thing, but up here—hell, there's nothing but air and mighty little of that!"

Norman grinned. "There'll be more. If I'm right about this thing we won't need to hop it—its own atmosphere will pick us up."

Both looked anxious as the motor sputtered briefly. But in a moment it was again roaring steadily. Norman shook his head.

"Maybe a fool's errand after all. No—I'm still sure we're right! But it seems that we don't prove it this time."

"Going down?" asked Hackett.

"We'll have to, in minutes. Even with its own air-feed the motor can't stand this height for—"

NORMAN never finished the words. There was a sound, a keen rising, rushing sound of immense power that reached their ears over the motor's roar. Then in an instant the universe seemed to go mad about them; they saw the gray ball of Earth and the sun above skyrocketing around them as the plane whirled madly.

The rushing sound was in that moment thunderous, terrible, and as winds smashed and rocked the plane like giant hands, Hackett glimpsed another sphere that was not the sphere of Earth, a greenish globe that expanded with lightning speed in the firmament beside their spinning plane! The winds stilled; the green globe changed abruptly to a landscape of green land and sea toward which the plane was falling! Norman was fighting the controls—land and sea were gyrating up to them with dizzy speed—crash!

With that cracking crash the plane was motionless. Sunlight poured through its windows, and great green growths were all around it. Hackett, despite Norman's warning cry, forced the door open and was bursting outside, Norman after him. They staggered and fell, with curious lightness and slowness, on the ground outside, then clutched the plane for support and gazed stupefiedly around them.

The plane had crashed down into a thicket of giant green reeds that rose a yard over their heads, its pancake landing having apparently not damaged it. The ground beneath their feet was soft and soggy, the air warm and balmy, and the giant reeds hid all the surrounding landscape from view.

In the sky the sun burned near one horizon with unusual brilliance. But it was dwarfed, in size, by the huge gray circle that filled half the heavens overhead. A giant gray sphere it was, screened here and there by floating white mists and clouds, that had yet plain on it the outlines of dark continents and gleaming seas. A quaking realization held the two as they stared up at it.

"EARTH!" Norman was babbling. "It's Earth, Hackett—above us; my God, I can't believe even yet that we've done it!"

"Then we're on—the satellite—the second satellite!—" Hackett fought for reality. "Those winds that caught us—"

"They were the atmosphere of this world, of the second satellite! They caught us and carried us on inside this smaller world's atmosphere, Hackett. We're moving with it around Earth at terrific speed now!"

"The second satellite, and we on it!" Hackett whispered, incredulously. "But these reeds—it can't all be like this—"

They stepped together away from the plane. The effort sent each of them sailing upward in a great, slow leap, to float down more than a score of feet from the plane. But unheeding in their eagerness this strange effect of the satellite's lesser gravitational power, they moved on, each step a giant, clumsy leap. Four such steps took them out of the towering reeds onto clear ground.

It was a gentle, grassy slope they were on, stretching away along a gray-green sea that extended out to the astoundingly near horizon on their right. To the left it rose into low hills covered with dense masses of green junglelike vegetation. Hackett and Norman, though, gazed neither at sea or hills for the moment, but at the half-score grotesque figures who had turned toward them as they emerged from the reeds. A sick sense of the unreal held them as they gazed, frozen with horror. For the great figures returning their gaze a few yards from them were—frog-men!

FROG-MEN! Great mottled green shapes seven to eight feet in height, with bowed, powerful legs and

arms that ended in webbed paws. The heads were bulbous ones in which wide, unwinking frog-eyes were set at the sides, the mouths white-lipped and white-lined. Three of the creatures held each a black metal tube-and-handle oddly like a target-pistol.

"Norman!" Hackett's voice was a crescendo of horror. *"Norman!"*

"Back to the plane!" Norman cried thickly. "The plane—"

The two staggered back, but the frog-men, recovering from their own first surprise, were running forward with great hopping steps! The two fliers flung themselves back in a floating leap toward the reeds, but the green monsters were quick after them. A croaking cry came from one and as another raised his tube-and-handle, something flicked from it that burst close beside Norman. There was no sound or light as it burst, but the reeds for a few feet around it vanished!

A HOARSE cry from Hackett—the creatures had reached him, grasped him at the edge of the reeds! Norman swerved in his floating leap to strike the struggling flier and frog-men. The scene whirled around him as he fought them, great paws reaching for him. With a sick, frantic rage he felt his clenched fist drive against cold, green, billowy bodies. Croaking cries sounded in his ears; then, Hackett and he were jerked to their feet, held tightly by four of the creatures.

"My God, Norman," panted Hackett, helpless. "What are they — frog-things?—"

"Steady, Hackett. They're the people of the second satellite, it seems; wait!"

One of the armed frog-men approached and inspected them, and then croaked an order in a deep voice. Then, still holding the two tightly, the party of monsters began to move along the slope, skirting the sea's edge. In a few minutes they reached two curious objects resting on the slope. They seemed long black metal boats, slender and with sharp prow and stern. A compact mechanism and control-board filled the prow, while at the stern and sides were long tubes mounted on swivels like machine-guns.

The frog-men motioned Norman and Hackett into one, fastening the two prisoners and themselves into their seats with metal straps provided for the purpose. Four had entered the one boat, the others that of the captives. One at the prow moved his paws over the control-board and with a purring of power the boat, followed by the other, rose smoothly into the air. It headed out over the gray-green sea, land dropping quickly from sight behind, the horizons water-bounded on all sides. From their nearness Norman guessed that this second satellite of Earth's was small indeed beside its mother planet. He had to look up to earth's great gray sphere overhead to attain a sense of reality.

Hackett was whispering beside him, the frog-men watchful. "Norman, it's not real—it can't be real! These things —these boats—intelligent like men—"

The other sought to steady him. "It's a different world, Hackett. Gravitation different, light different, everything different, and evolution here has had a different course. On Earth men evolved to be the most intelligent life-forms, but here the frog-races, it seems."

"But where are they taking us? Could we ever find the plane again?"

"God knows. If we ever get away from these things we might. And we've got to find Fellows, too; I wonder where he is on this world."

FOR many minutes the two boats raced on at great speed over the endless waters before the watery skyline was broken far ahead by something dark and unmoving. Hackett and Norman peered with intense interest toward it. It seemed at first a giant squat mountain rising from the sea, but as they shot nearer they saw that its outline was too regular, and that colossal as it was in size it was the work of

intelligence. They gasped as they came nearer and got a better view of it.

For it was a gigantic dome of black metal rising sheer from the lonely sea, ten miles if anything in diameter, a third that in greatest height. There was no gate or window or opening of any kind in it. Just the colossal smooth black dome rearing from the watery plain. Yet the two boats were flashing lower toward it.

"They can't be going inside!" Hackett conjectured. "There's no way in and what could be in there? The whole thing's mad—"

"There's some way," Norman said. "They're slowing—"

The flying-boats were indeed slowing as they dipped lower. They were very near the dome now, its curving wall a looming, sky-high barrier before them. Suddenly the boats dipped sharply downward toward the green sea. Before the two fliers could comprehend their purpose, could do aught more than draw instinctive great breaths in preparation, the two craft had shot down into the waters and were arrowing down through the green depths.

Blinded, flung against his metal strap by the resistance of the waters they ripped through, Norman yet retained enough of consciousness to glimpse beams of light that stabbed ahead from the prows of their rushing boats, to see vaguely strange creatures of the deep blundering in and out of those beams as the boats hurtled forward. The water that forced its way between his lips was fresh, he was vaguely aware, and even as he fought to hold his breath was aware too that the frog-men seemed in no way incommoded by the sudden transition into the water, their amphibian nature allowing them to stay under it far longer than any human could do.

The boats ripped through the waters at terrific speed and in a few seconds there loomed before them the giant metal wall of the great dome, going down into the depths here. Norman glimpsed vaguely that the whole colossal dome rested on a vast pedestal-like mountain of rock that rose from the sea's floor almost to the surface. Then a great round opening in the wall; the boats flashed into it and were hurtling along a water-filled tunnel. Norman felt his lungs near bursting—when the tunnel turned sharply upward and the boats whizzed up and abruptly out of the water-tunnel into air!

BUT it was not the open air again. They were beneath the gigantic dome! For as Norman and Hackett breathed deep, awe fell on their faces as they took in the scene. Far overhead stretched the dome's colossally curving roof, and far out on all sides. It was lit beneath that roof by a clear light that the two would have sworn was sunlight. The dome was in effect the roof of a gigantic, illuminated building, and upon its floor there stretched a mighty city.

The city of the frog-men! Their boats were rising up over it and Norman and Hackett saw it clear. Square mile upon square mile of structures stretched beneath the dome, black buildings often of immense size, varying in shape, but all of square, rectangular proportions. Between them moved countless frog-hordes, swirling throngs in streets and squares, and over the roofs darted thick swarms of flying-boats. And at the city's center, in a great, circular, clear space, lay a wide, round, green pool—the opening of the water-tunnel up through which they had come.

Norman pointed down toward it. "That's your answer!" he cried. "The only entrance to this frog-city is from the sea, up through that water-tunnel!"

"Good God, an amphibian city!" Hackett was shaken, white-faced.

The two boats were driving quickly over the city, through the swarming craft. Norman glimpsed towering buildings that might have been palaces, temples, laboratories. They slowed

and dipped toward one block-like building not far from the water-tunnel's opening. Armed frog-guards were on its roof, and other boats rested there. The two came to rest and the two captives were jerked out, the guards seizing them.

Half-dragged and half-floating they were led toward an opening in the roof from which a stair led downward. They passed down thus into the building's interior, lit by many windows. Norman glimpsed long halls ending in barred doors, guards here and there. Tube-lines ran along the walls and somewhere machines were throbbing dully. They came at last to a barred door whose guard opened it at the croaking order of the frog-men who held the two, and they were thrust inside, as the door clanged. They turned, and exclaimed in amazement. The room held fully a half-hundred men!

They were men such as the two fliers had never seen before, like humans except that their skins were a light green instead of the normal white and pink. They were dressed in dark short tunics, and kept talking to each other in a tongue quite unintelligible to Norman and Hackett. They came closer, flocking curiously around the two men, with a babel of voices quite meaningless to the two. Then one of the men uttered an exclamation, and all turned.

THE barred door had swung open and a half-dozen frog-guards entered, followed by two frog-men carrying a square little mechanism from which tubing led back out through the door.

"Norman—these men—" Hackett was whispering rapidly. "If there are men in this world, too, it may be that—"

"Quiet, Hackett — look at what they're doing."

The two frog-men had set their mechanism in place and then croaked out a brief word or order. Slowly, reluctantly, one of the green men moved toward them. Quickly they removed a metal disk fastened to his arm, exposing a small orifice like an unhealed wound. Onto this they fastened a suckerlike object from which a transparent tube led back through the mechanism. The machine hummed and at once a red stream pulsed through the tube and back through the mechanism. The man to whom it was attached was growing rapidly pale!

Norman, sick with horror, clutched his companion. "Hackett—these frog-men are sucking his blood from him!"

"Good God! And look—they're doing it with another!"

"All of these men—kept prisoners to furnish them with blood. It must be the damned creatures' food! And we here with the others—"

A common horror shook the two. It did not seem to affect the green men in the room, though, who advanced to the mechanism one by one with a reluctant air as of cows unwilling to be milked. Each was attached to the mechanism by the sucking disk on his arm, and out of each the blood poured through the tube. The metal disk was replaced on his arm then and he went back to the others. Norman saw that the frog-men took only from each an amount of blood that they could lose and yet live, since, though each came back pale and weak from the mechanism, they were able to walk.

"It must be their food—human blood!" Norman repeated. "They may have thousands on thousands of humans penned up like this, like so many herds of cows, and perhaps they live entirely on the life-blood they milk from them. Human cows—God!"

"Norman—look—they're calling to us!"

THE two stiffened. All the others in the room had taken their turn at the blood-sucking mechanism and now the frog-men croaked their order to the two fliers. They had forgotten their own predicament in the horror of the scene, but now it became real to them. They backed against the room's wall, quivering, dangerous.

The frog-guards came forward to drag them to the machine. A webbed paw was outstretched but Hackett with a wild blow drove the frog-man back and downward. The frog-guards leaped, and Norman and Hackett struck them back with all the greater strength the lesser gravitation gave them. The room was in an uproar, the green men shouting hoarsely and seeming on the point of rushing to their aid.

But the menacing force-pistols of the other frog-guards held back the shouting men and in moments the two fliers were overpowered by sheer weight of frog-bodies. Norman felt himself dragged to the machine.

Pain needled his upper arm as an incision was made. He felt the sucking-disk attached; then the machine hummed, and a sickening nausea swept him as the blood drained from his body. Held tightly by the guards he went dizzy, weak, but at last felt the sucker removed and a metal disk fastened over the incision. He was jerked aside and Hackett, his face deathly white, was dragged into his place. In a moment some of the latter's blood had been pumped from him also.

The machine was withdrawn, Norman and Hackett were released, and the frog-men, with their black force-pistols watchfully raised, withdrew, the door clanging. The room settled back to quietness, the green men stretching in lassitude on the metal bunks around it. The two fliers crouched down near the door, shuddering nausea and weakness still holding them.

Norman found that Hackett was laughing weakly. "To think that twenty-four hours ago I was in New York," he half-laughed, half-sobbed. "On Earth—Earth—"

The other gripped his arm. "It's horrible, Hackett, I know. But it isn't instant death, and we've still a chance to escape. Hell, can damn frog-men keep us here? Where's your nerve, man?"

A voice beside them made them turn in amazement. "You are men from Earth?" it asked, in queerly accented English. "From Earth?"

ASTONISHMENT held them as they saw who spoke. It was one of the green men in the room, who had settled down by their side. A tall figure with superb muscles and frank, clean countenance, his dark eyes afire with eagerness.

"English?" Norman exclaimed. "You know English—you understand me?"

The other showed his teeth in a smile. "I know, yes. I am Sarja, and I learned to speak it from Fallas, in my city, before the Ralas caught me."

"Fallas—" Norman repeated, puzzled; then suddenly he flamed. "By God, he means Fellows!"

"Fallas, yes," said the other. "From the sky he fell into our city in a strange flying-boat that was smashed. He was hurt but we cared for him, and he taught me his speech, which I heard you talking now."

"Then Fellows is in your city now?" asked Hackett eagerly. "Where is that?"

"Across this sea—back in the hills," the other waved. "It is far from the sea but I was rash one day and came too near the water in my flying-boat. The Ralas were out raiding and they saw me, caught me, and brought me here. No escape now, until I die."

"The Ralas—you mean these frog-men?" Norman asked.

Sarja nodded. "Of course. They are the tyrants and oppressors of this world. Our little world is but a tenth or less the size of your great Earth which it circles, but it has its lands and rivers, and this one great fresh-water sea into which the latter empty. In this sea long ago developed the Ralas, the great frog-men who acquired such intelligence and arts that they became lords of this world.

"Through the centuries, while on the land our races of green men have been struggling upward, the Ralas have oppressed them. Long ago the Ralas left

all their other cities to build this one great amphibian city at the sea's center. Entrance to it is only by the water-tunnel from without, and being frog-people entrance thus is easy for them since they can move for many minutes under water, though they drown like any other breathing animal if kept under too long. Humans dare not try to enter it thus by the water-tunnel, since, before they could find it and make their way up through it, they would have drowned.

"SO the Ralas have ruled from this impregnable amphibian city. Its colossal metal dome is invulnerable to ordinary attack, and though solid and without openings it is always as light beneath the dome here as outside, since the Ralas' scientists contrived light-condensers and conductors that catch light outside and bring it in to release inside. So when it is day outside the sunlight is as bright here, and when night comes the Earthlight shines here the same as without.

"From this city their raiding parties have gone out endlessly to swoop down on the cities of us green men. Since we learned to make flying-boats like theirs, with molecular-motors, and to make the guns like theirs that fire shells filled with annihilating force, we have resisted them stoutly but their raids have not ceased. And always they have brought their prisoners back in to this, their city.

"Tens of thousands of green men they have prisoned here like us, for the sole purpose of supplying them with blood. For the Ralas live on this blood alone, changing it chemically to fit their own bodies and then taking it into their bodies. It eliminates all necessity for food here for them. Every few days they drain blood from us, and since we are well fed and cared for to keep us good blood-producers, we will be here for a long time before we die."

"But haven't you made any attempt to get out of here—to escape?" Norman asked.

Sarja smiled. "Who could escape the city of the Ralas? In all recorded history it has never been done, for even if by some miracle you got a flying-boat, the opening of the water-tunnel that leads outward is guarded always."

"Guards or no guards, we're going to try it and not sit here to furnish blood for the Ralas," Norman declared. "Are you willing to help, to try to get to Fellows and your city?"

The green man considered. "It is hopeless," he said, "but as well to die beneath the force-shells of the Ralas as live out a lifetime here. Yes, I will help, though I cannot see how you expect to escape even from this room."

"I think we can manage that," Norman told him. "But first—not a word to these others. We can't hope to escape with them all, and there is no knowing what one might not betray us to the frog-men."

He went on then to outline to the other two the idea that had come to him. Both exclaimed at the simpleness of the idea, though Sarja remained somewhat doubtful. While Hackett slept, weak still from his loss of blood, Norman had the green man scratch on the metal floor as well as possible a crude map of the satellite's surface, and found that the city, where Fellows was, seemed some hundreds of miles back from the sea.

WHILE they talked, the sunlight, apparently sourceless, that came through the heavily barred windows of the room faded rapidly, and dusk settled over the great amphibian city beneath the giant dome, kept from total darkness by a silvery pervading light that Norman reflected must be the light from Earth's great sphere. With the dusk's coming the activities in the frog-city lessened greatly.

With dusk, too, frog-guards entered the room bearing long metal troughs filled with a red jellylike substance, that they placed on racks along the wall. As the guards withdrew the men in the room rushed toward the troughs,

elbowing each other aside and striking each other to scoop up and eat as much of the red jelly as possible. It was for all the world like the feeding of farm-animals, and Hackett and Norman so sickened at the sight that they had no heart to try the food. Sarja, though, had no such scruples and seemed to make a hearty meal at one of the troughs.

After the meal the green men sought the bunks and soon were stretched in sonorous slumber. It was, Norman reflected, exactly the existence of domesticated animals—to eat and sleep and give food to their masters. A deeper horror of the frog-men shook him, and a deeper determination to escape them. He waited until all in the room were sleeping before beckoning to Sarja and Hackett.

"Quiet now," he whispered to them. "If these others wake they'll make such a clamor we won't have a chance in the world. Ready, Sarja?"

The green man nodded. "Yes, though I still think such a thing's impossible."

"Probably is," Norman admitted. "But it's the one chance we've got, the immensely greater strength of our Earth-muscle that the frog-men must have forgotten when they put us in here."

They moved silently to the room's great barred door, outside which a frog-guard paced. They waited until he had passed the door and on down the hall, then Norman and Hackett and Sarja grasped together one of the door's vertical bars. It was an inch and a half in thickness, of solid metal, and it seemed ridiculous that any men could bent it by the sheer strength of their muscles.

Norman, though, was relying on the fact that on the second satellite, with its far lesser gravitational influence, their Earth-muscles gave them enormous strength. He grasped the bar, Hackett and Sarja gripping it below him, and then at a whispered word they pulled with all their force. The bar resisted and again, with sweat starting on their foreheads, they pulled. It gave a little.

THEY shrank back from it as the guard returned, moving past. Then grasping the bar again they bent all their force once more upon it. Each effort saw it bending more, the opening in the door's bars widening. They gave a final great wrench and the bent bar squealed a little. They shrank back, appalled, but the guard had not heard or noticed. He moved past it on his return along the hall, and no sooner was past it than Norman squeezed through the opening and leaped silently for the great frog-man's back.

It went down with a wild flurry of waving webbed paws and croaking cries, stilled almost instantly by Norman's terrific blows. There was silence then as Hackett and Sarja squeezed out after him, the momentary clamor of the battle having aroused no one.

The three leaped together toward the stairs. In two great floating leaps they were on the floor above, Hackett and Norman dragging Sarja between them. They were not seen, were sailing in giant steps up another stair, hopes rising high. The last stair—the roof-opening above; and then from beneath a great croaking cry swelled instantly into chorus of alarmed shouts.

"They've found the door — the guard!" panted Hackett.

They were bursting out onto the roof. Frog-guards were on it who came in a hopping rush toward them, force-pistols raised. But a giant leap took Hackett among them, to amaze them for a moment with great flailing blows. Sarja had leaped for the nearest flying-boat resting on the roof, and was calling in a frantic voice to Norman and Hackett. Norman was turning toward Hackett, the center of a wild combat, but the latter emerged from it for a brief second to motion him frantically back.

"No use, Norman—get away—get away!" he cried hoarsely, frenziedly.

"Hackett—for God's sake—!" Nor-

man half-leaped to the other, but an arm caught him, pulled him desperately onto the boat's surface. It was Sarja, the long craft flying over the roof beneath his control.

"They come!" he panted. "Too late now—" Frogmen were pouring up onto the roof from below. Sarja sent the craft rocketing upward, as Hackett gestured them away for a last frantic time before going down beneath the frog-men's onslaught.

THE roof and the combat on it dropped back and beneath them like a stone as their craft ripped across the silvery dusk over the mighty frog-city. They were shooting toward the city's center, toward the green pool that was the entrance to the water-tunnel, while behind and beneath an increasing clamor of alarm spread swiftly. Norman raged futilely.

"Hackett—Hackett! We can't leave him—"

"Too late!" Sarja cried. "We cannot help him but only be captured again. We escape now and come back—come back—"

The truth of it pierced Norman's brain even in the wild moment. Hackett had fought and held back the frog-guards only that they might escape. He shouted suddenly.

"Sarja—the water-tunnel!" A half-dozen boats with frog-guards on them were rising round it in answer to the alarm!

"The force-gun!" cried the green man. "Beside you—!"

Norman whirled, glimpsed the long tube on its swivel beside him, trained it on the boats rising ahead as they rocketed nearer. He fumbled frantically at a catch at the gun's rear, then felt a stream of shells flicking out of it. Two of the boats ahead vanished as the shells released their annihilating force, another sagged and fell. From the remaining three invisible force-shells flicked around them, but in an instant Sarja had whirled the boat through them and down into the water-tunnel!

Norman clung desperately to his seat as the boat flashed down through the waters, and then, as Sarja sent it flying out through the great tunnel's waters, glimpsed, close behind, the beams of the three Rala boats as they pursued them through the tunnel, overtaking them. Could the force-shells be fired under water? Norman did not know, but desperately he swung the force-gun back as they rushed through the waters, and pressed the catch. An instant later beams and boats behind them in the tunnel vanished.

His lungs were afire; it seemed that he must open them to the strangling water. The boat was ripping the waters at such tremendous speed that he felt himself being torn from his hold on it. Pain seemed poured like molten metal through his chest—he could hold out no longer; and then the boat stabbed up from the waters into clear air!

NORMAN panted, sobbed. Behind them rose the colossal metal dome of the frog-city, gleaming dully in the silvery light that flooded the far-stretching seas. That light poured down from a stupendous silver crescent in the night skies. Norman saw dully the dark outlines on it before he remembered. Earth! He laughed a little hysterically. Sarja was driving the flying-boat out over the sea and away from the frog-city at enormous speed. At last he glanced back. Far behind them lay the great dome and up around it gleaming lights were pouring, lights of pursuing Rala boats.

"We escape," Sarja cried, "the city of the Ralas, from which none ever before escaped!"

Remembrance smote Norman. "Hackett! Held off those frog-men so we could get away—we'll come back for him, by God!"

"We come back!" said Sarja. "We come back with all the green men of this world to the Ralas' city, yes! I know what Fallas has planned."

"Can you find your way to him—to your city?" Norman asked.

Sarja nodded, looking upward. "Before the next sun has come and gone we can reach it."

The boat flew onward, and the great dome and the searching lights around it dropped beneath the horizon. Norman felt the warm wind drying his drenched garments as they rushed onward.. Crouched on the boat he gazed up toward the silver crescent of Earth sinking toward the horizon ahead. That meant, he told himself, that the satellite turned slowly on its axis as it whirled around Earth. It came to him that its night and day periods must be highly irregular.

When the sun climbed from the waters behind them they were flying still over a boundless waste of waters, but soon they sighted on the horizon ahead the thin green line of land. Sarja slowed as they reached it, took his bearings, and sent the craft flying onward.

They passed over a grey coastal plain and then over low hills joined in long chains and mantled by dense and mighty jungles, towering green growths of unfamiliar appearance to Norman. He thought he glimpsed, more than once, huge beastlike forms moving in them. He did see twice in the jungles great clearings where were fair-sized cities of bright-green buildings, a metal tower rising from each. But when he pointed to them Sarja shook his head.

AT last, as they passed over another range of hills and came into sight of a third green city with its looming tower, the other pointed, his face alight.

"My city," he said. "Fallas there."

Fellows! Norman's heart beat faster.

They shot closer and lower and he saw that the buildings were obviously green to lend them a certain protective coloration similar to that of the green jungles around them. The tower with its surmounting cage puzzled him, though, but before he could ask Sarja concerning it his answer came in a different way. A long metal tube poked slowly out of the cage on the tower's top and sent a hail of force-shells flicking around them.

"They're firing on us!" Norman cried. "This can't be your city!"

"They see our black boat!" Sarja exclaimed. "They think we're Rala raiders and unless we let them know they'll shoot us out of the air! Stand up—wave to them—!"

Both Norman and Sarja sprang to their feet and waved wildly to those in the tower-cage, their flying-boat drifting slowly forward. Instantly the force-shells ceased to hail toward them, and as they moved nearer a sirenlike signal broke from the cage. At once scores of flying-boats like their own, but glittering metal instead of black, shot up from the city where they had lain until now, and surrounded them.

As Sarja called in his own tongue to them the green men on the surrounding boats broke into resounding cries. They shot down toward the city, Norman gazing tensely. Great crowds of green men in their dark tunics had swarmed out into its streets with the passing of the alarm, and their craft and the others came to rest in an open square that was the juncture of several streets.

The green men that crowded excitedly about Norman and Sarja gave way to a half-dozen hurrying into the square from the greatest of the buildings facing on it. All but one were green men like the others. But that one—the laughing-eyed tanned face—the worn brown clothing, the curious huge steps with which he came—Norman's heart leapt.

"Fellows!"

"Great God—Norman!" The other's face was thunderstruck. "Norman—how by all that's holy did you get here?"

NORMAN, mind and body strained to the breaking point, was incoherent. "We guessed how you'd gone—the second satellite, Fellows— Hack-

ett and I came after you—taken to that frog-city—"

As Norman choked the tale, Fellows' face was a study. And when it was finished he swallowed, and gripped Norman's hand viselike.

"And you and Hackett figured it out and came after me—took that risk? Crazy, both of you. Crazy—"

"Fellows, Hackett's still there, if he's alive! In the Rala city!"

Fellows' voice was grim, quick. "We'll have him out, Norman, if he still lives. And living or dead, the Ralas will pay soon for this and for all they've done upon this world in ages. Their time nears—yes."

He led Norman, excited throngs of the green men about them, into the great building from which he had emerged. There were big rooms inside, workshops and laboratories that Norman but vaguely glimpsed in passing. The room to which the other led him was one with a long metal couch. Norman stretched protestingly upon it at the other's bidding, drifted off almost at once into sleep.

He woke to find the sunlight that had filled the room gone and replaced by the silvery Earth-light. From the window he saw that the silver-lit city outside now held tremendous activity, immense hordes of green men surging through it with masses of weapons and equipment, flying-boats pouring down out of the night from all directions. He turned as the door of the room clicked open behind him. It was his old friend Fellows.

"I thought you'd be awake by now, Norman. Feeling fit?"

"As though I'd slept a week," Norman said, and the other laughed his old care-free laugh.

"You almost have, at that. Two days and nights you've slept, but it all adds up to hardly more than a dozen hours."

"This world!" Norman's voice held all his incredulity. "To think that we should be on it—a second satellite of Earth's—it seems almost beyond belief."

"SOMETIMES it seems so to me, too," Fellows said thoughtfully. "But it's not a bad world—not the human part of it, at least. When this satellite's atmosphere caught me and pitchforked me down among these green men, smashing the plane and almost myself, they took care of me. You say three others vanished as I did? I never heard of them here; they must have crashed into the sea or jungles. Of course, I'd have got backs to Earth on one of these flying-boats if I'd been able, but their molecular power won't take them far from this world's surface, so I couldn't.

"As it was, the green men cared for me, and when I found how those frog-men have dominated this world for ages, how that city of the Ralas has spread endless terror among the humans here, I resolved to smash those monsters whatever I did. I taught some of the green men like Sarja my own speech, later learning theirs, and in the weeks I've been here I've been working out a way to smash the Ralas.

"You know that amphibian city is almost impregnable because humans can hardly live long enough under the water to get into it, let alone fight under water as the frog-men can. To meet them on even terms the green men needed diving-helmets with an oxygen supply. They'd never heard of such an idea, too afraid of the sea ever to experiment in it, but I convinced them and they've made enough helmets for all their forces. In them they can meet the Ralas under water on equal terms.

"And there's a chance we can destroy that whole Rala city with their help. It's built on a giant pedestal of rock rising from the sea's floor, as you saw, and I've had some of the green men make huge force-shells or force-bombs that ought to be powerful enough to split that pedestal beneath the city. If we can get a chance to place those bombs it may smash the frog-men forever on this world. But one thing is sure: we're going to get Hackett out if he still lives!"

"Then you're going to attack the Rala city now?" Norman cried.

Fellows nodded grimly. "While you have slept all the forces of the green men on this world have been gathering. Your coming has only precipitated our plans, Norman—the whole soul of the green races has been set upon this attack for weeks!"

NORMAN, half bewildered at the swiftness with which events rushed upon him, found himself striding with Fellows in great steps out through the building into the great square. It was shadowed now by mass on mass of flying-boats, crowded with green men, that hung over it and over the streets. One boat, Sarja at its controls, waited on the ground and as they entered and buckled themselves into the seats the craft drove up to hang with the others.

A shattering cheer greeted them. Norman saw that in the silvery light of Earth's great crescent there stretched over the city and surrounding jungle now a veritable plain of flying-boats. On each were green men and each bristled with force-guns, and had as many great goggled helmets fastened to it as it had occupants. He glimpsed larger boats loaded with huge metal cylinders —the force-bombs Fellows had mentioned.

Fellows rose and spoke briefly in a clear voice to the assembled green men on their craft, and another great shout roared from them, and from those who watched in the city below. Then as he spoke a word, Sarja sent their craft flying out over the city, and the great mass of boats, fully a thousand in number, were hurtling in a compact column after them.

Fellows leaned to Norman as the great column of purring craft shot on over the silver-lit jungles. "We'll make straight for the Rala city and try getting into it before they understand what's happening."

"Won't they have guards out?"

"Probably, but we can beat them back into the city before their whole forces can come out on us. That's the only way in which we can get inside and reach Hackett. And while we're attacking the force-bombs can be placed, though I don't rely too much on them."

"If the attack only succeeds in getting us inside," Norman said, grim-lipped, "we'll have a chance—"

"It's on the knees of the gods. These green men are doing an unprecedented thing in attacking the Rálas, the masters of this world, remember. But they've got ages of oppression to avenge; they'll fight."

The fleet flew on, hills and rivers a silver-lit panorama unreeling beneath them. Earth's crescent sank behind them, and by the time they flashed out over the great fresh-water sea, the sun was rising like a flaming eye from behind it. Land sank from sight behind and the green men were silent, tense, as they saw stretching beneath only the gray waters that for ages had been the base of the dread frog-men. But still the fleet's column raced on.

AT last the column slowed. Far ahead the merest bulge broke the level line where sky and waters met. The amphibian city of the Ralas! At Fellows' order the flying-boats sank downward until they moved just above the waters. Another order made the green hosts don the grotesque helmets. Norman found that while cumbersome their oxygen supply was unfailing. They shot on again at highest speed, but as the gigantic black dome of the frog-city grew in their vision there darted up from around it suddenly a far-flung swarm of black spots.

"Rala boats!"

The muffled exclamation was Fellows'. There needed now no order on his part, though. Like hawks, leaping for prey, the fleet of the green men sprang through the air. Norman, clutching the force-gun between his knees, had time only to see that the Rala craft were a few hundred in number and that, contemptuous of the

greater odds that favored these humans they had so long oppressed, they were flying straight to meet them. Then the two fleets met—and were spinning side by side above the waters.

Norman saw the thing only as a wild whirl of Rala boats toward and beside them, great green frog-men crowding the craft, their force-guns hailing shells. Automatically, with the old air-fighting instinct, his fingers had pressed the catch of the gun between his knees and as its shells flicked toward the rushing boats he saw areas of nothingness opening suddenly in their mass, shells striking and exploding in annihilating invisibility there and in their own fleet.

The two fleets mingled and merged momentarily, the battle becoming a thing of madness, a huge whirl of black and glittering flying-boats together, striking shells exploding nothingness about them. The Ralas were fighting like demons.

The merged, terrific combat lasted but moments; could last but moments. Norman, his gun's magazine empty, seemed to see the mass of struggling ships splittering, diverging; then saw that the black craft were dropping, plummeting downward toward the waves! The Ralas, stunned by that minute of terrific combat, were fleeing. Muffled cries and cheers came from about him as the glittering flying-boats of the green men shot after them. They crashed down into the waters and curved deeply into their green depths, toward the gigantic dome.

AHEAD the Rala boats were in flight toward their city, and now their pursuers were like sharks striking after them. There in the depths the force-guns of black and glittering boats alike were spitting, and giant waves and underwater convulsions rocked pursued and pursuers as the exploding shells annihilated boats and water about them. The tunnel! Its round opening yawned in the looming wall ahead, and Norman saw the Rala craft, reduced to scores in number, hurtling into it, to rouse all the forces of the great amphibian city. Their own boats were flashing into the opening after them. He glimpsed as he glanced back for a moment the larger craft with the great force-bombs veering aside behind them.

It was nightmare in the water-tunnel. Flashing beams of the craft ahead and waters that rocked and smashed around them as in flight the Ralas still rained back force-shells toward them in a chaos of action. Once the frog-men turned to hold them back in the tunnel, but by sheer weight the rushing ships of the green men crashed them onward. Boats were going into nothingness all around them. A part of Norman's brain wondered calmly why they survived even while another part kept his gun again working, with refilled magazine. Fellows and Sarja were grotesque shapes beside him. Abruptly the tunnel curved upward and as they flashed up after the remaining Rala craft their boats ripped up into clear air! They were beneath the giant dome!

The frog-men chased inward spread out in all directions over their mighty, swarming city, and across it a terrific clamor of alarm ran instantly as the green men emerged after them! Norman saw flying-boats beginning to rise across all the city and realized that moments would see all the immense force of the Ralas, the thousands of craft they could muster, pouring upon them. He pointed out over the city to a block-like building; and shouted madly through his helmet to Fellows and Sarja:

"Hackett!"

But already Sarja had sent their craft whirling across the city toward the structure, half their fleet behind it, with part still emerging from the water-tunnel. Rala boats rose before them, but nothing could stop them now, their force-shells raining ahead to clear a path for their meteor-flight. They shot down toward the block-

structure, and Norman, half-crazed by now, saw that to descend and enter was suicide in the face of the frog-forces rising now over all the city. He cried to Fellows, and with two of the guns as they swooped lower they sprayed force-shells along the building's side.

THE shells struck and whiffed away the whole side, exposing the level on the building's interior. Out from it rushed swarms of crazed green men, sweeping aside the frog-men guards, while far over the city the invading craft were loosing shells on the block-like buildings that held the prisoners, tens of thousands of them swarming forth. In the throng below as they raced madly forth Norman saw one, and shouted wildly. The one brown garbed figure looked up, saw their boat swooping lower, and leaped for it in a tremendous forty-foot spring that brought his fingers to its edge. Norman pulled him frenziedly up.

"Norman!" he babbled. "In God's name—Fellows—!"

"That helmet, Hackett!" Fellows flung at him. "My God, look at those prisoners—Norman!"

The countless thousands of green men released from the buildings whose walls had vanished under the shells of the invaders had poured forth to make the amphibian city a chaos of madness. Oblivious to all else they were throwing themselves upon the city's crowding frog-men in a battle whose ferocity was beyond belief, disregarding all else in this supreme chance to wreak vengeance on the monstrous beings who had fed upon their blood. In the incredible insanity of that raging fury the craft of the green men hanging over the city were all but forgotten.

Suddenly the city and the mighty dome over it quivered violently, and then again. There came from beneath a dull, vast, grinding roar.

"The great force-bombs!" Fellows screamed. "They've set them off—the city's sinking—out of here, for the love of God!"

The boat whirled beneath Sarja's hands toward the pool of the water-tunnel, all their fleet rushing with them. The grinding roar was louder, terrible; dome and city were shaking violently now; but in the insensate fury of their struggle the frog-men and their released prisoners were hardly aware of it. The whole great dome seemed sinking upon them and the city falling beneath it as Sarja's craft ripped down into the tunnel's waters, and then out, at awful speed, as the great tunnel's walls swayed and sank around them! They shot out into the green depths from it to hear a dull, colossal crashing through the waters from behind as the great pedestal of rock on which the city had stood, shattered by the huge force-bombs, collapsed. And as their boats flashed up into the open air they saw that the huge dome of the city of the Ralas was gone.

Beneath them was only a titanic whirlpool of foaming waters in which only the curved top of the settling dome was visible for a moment as it sank slowly and ponderously downward, with a roar as of the roar of falling worlds. Buckling, collapsing, sinking, it vanished in the foam-wild sea with all the frog-men who for ages had ruled the second satellite, and with all those prisoners who had at the last dragged them down with them to death! Ripping off their helmets, with all the green men shouting crazily about them, Norman and Fellows and Hackett stared down at the colossal maelstrom in the waters that was the tomb of the masters of a world.

Then the depression's sides collapsed, the waters rushing together ... and beneath them was but troubled, tossing sea.

EARTH'S great gray ball was overhead again and the sun was sinking again to the horizon when the three soared upward in the long, gleaming plane, its motor roaring. Norman, with Hackett and Fellows crowding the

narrow cabin beside him, waved with them through its windows. For all around them were rising the flying-boats of the green men.

They were waving wildly, shouting their farewells, Sarja's tall figure erect at the prow of one. Insistent they had been that the three should stay, the three through whom the monstrous age-old tyranny of the frog-men had been lifted, but Earth-sickness was on them, and they had flown to where the plane lay still unharmed among the reeds, a hundred willing hands dragging it forth for the take-off.

The plane soared higher, motor thundering, and they saw the flying-boats sinking back from around them. They caught the wave of Sarja's hand still from the highest, and then that, too, was gone.

Upward they flew toward the great gray sphere, their eyes on the dark outlines of its continents and on one continent. Higher — higher — green land and gray sea receding beneath them; Hackett and Fellows intent and eager as Norman kept the plane rising. The satellite lay, a greenish globe, under them. And as they went higher still a rushing sound came louder to their ears.

"The edge of the satellite's atmosphere?" Fellows asked, as Norman nodded.

"We're almost to it—here we go!"

As he shot the plane higher, great forces smote it, gray Earth and green satellite and yellow sun gyrating round it as it reeled and plunged. Then suddenly it was falling steadily, gray Earth and its dark continent now beneath, while with a dwindling rushing roar its second satellite whirled away above them, passing and vanishing. Passing as though, to Norman, it seemed, all their strange sojourn on it were passing; the frog-men and their mighty city, Sarja and their mad flight, the green men and the last terrific battle; all whirling away—whirling away.

HISTORIC EXPERIMENT PROVES EARTH'S ROTATION

THE famous experiment which proves that the "earth do move" by letting the observer actually see it twisting underneath his feet, an experiment invented by the French mathematician Jean B. L. Foucault nearly a century ago, was repeated recently under unusually impressive circumstances before an international scientific congress at Florence, Italy, the same city where Galileo once was persecuted for holding the same opinion.

From the center of the dome of the Church of Santa Marie di Fiore, Father Guido Alfani, director of the Astronomical Observatory, suspended a 200-pound weight on a wire 150 feet long. On the bottom of this weight was a tiny projecting point which traced a line on a table-top sprinkled with sand, as the great pendulum swung slowly back and forth. At a given signal Father Alfani set the pendulum to swinging. While the assembled scientists watched it, slowly the line traced across the sand table-top changed direction.

As Foucault proved long ago and as the watching scientists well knew, the table was being twisted underneath the pendulum by the rotation of the earth.

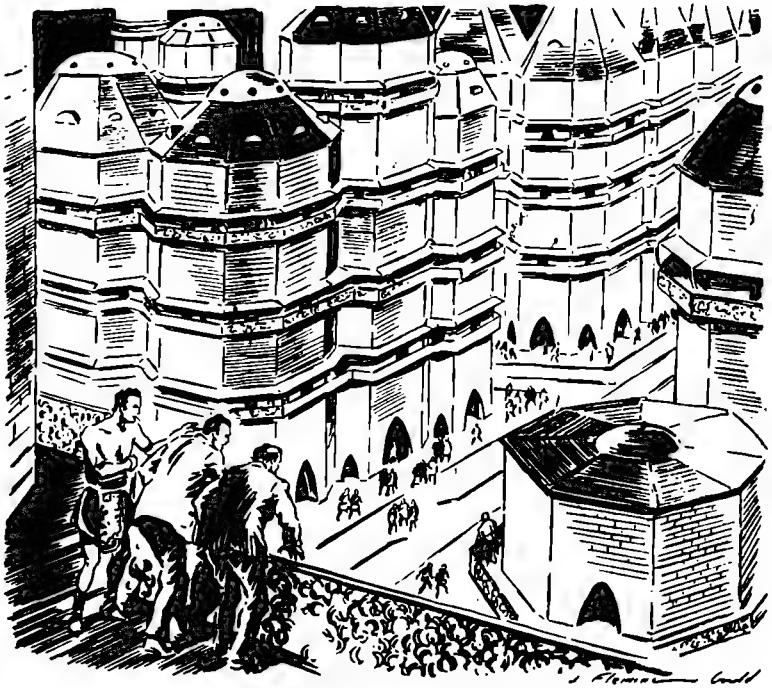
A REVOLUTIONARY AIRPLANE

A NEW airplane propeller has recently been patented by J. Kalmanson of Brooklyn, N. Y. Greater speed and marked saving in fuel is claimed for the invention, which may be attached to any type of airplane.

The device is in two parts, which may be used separately as front and rear propellers or combined into a single blade. The principle is that the front one acts to bring air to the other, giving the propeller more of a hold, so to speak, and greater power. This is accomplished by four air-spoons, one on each side of each blade of the propeller.

It is said that the device can double the speed of an airplane and raise it from the ground in ninety feet instead of the 200 feet most airplanes now require. It is also claimed that the new propeller will prevent the plane from making a nose dive unless the pilot forces it to do so, and enable it to make a safe landing within a short distance. Because of the increase in power and speed, the device would save a large amount of gasoline and oil, as well as guarding the motor from part of the strain on it.

The device is said to be also applicable to ships, the same principle operating in water as well as air.



Orrin led the way to a great underground city.

Silver Dome

By Harl Vincent

IN a secluded spot among the hills of northern New Jersey stood the old DeBost mansion, a rambling frame structure of many wings and gables that was well-nigh hidden from the road by the half-mile or more of second-growth timber which intervened. High on the hill it stood, and it was only by virtue of its altitude that an occasional glimpse might be obtained of weatherbeaten gable or partly tumbled-down chimney. The place was reputed to be haunted since the death of old DeBost, some seven years previously, and the path which had once been a winding driveway was now seldom trod by human foot.

In her deep-buried kingdom of Theros, Phaestra reveals the amazing secret of the Silver Dome.

It was now two years since Edwin Leland bought the estate for a song and took up his residence in the gloomy old house. And it had then been vacant for five years since DeBost shot himself in the northeast bedroom. Leland's associates were sure he would repent of his bargain in a very short time, but he stayed on and on in the place, with no company save

that of his man-servant, an aged hunchback who was known to outsiders only as Thomas.

Leland was a scientist of note before he buried himself in the DeBost place, and had been employed in the New York research laboratory of one of the large electrical manufacturers, where he was much admired and not a little envied by his fellow workers. These knew almost nothing of his habits or of his personal affairs, and were much surprised when he announced one day that he had come into a sizable fortune and was leaving the organization to go in for private research and study. Attempts to dissuade him were of no avail, and the purchase of the DeBost property followed, after which Leland dropped from sight for nearly two years.

THEN, on a blustery winter day, a strange telephone call was received at the laboratory where he had previously worked. It was from old Thomas, out there in the DeBost mansion, and his quavering voice asked for Frank Rowley, the genial young engineer whose work had been most closely associated with Leland's.

"Oh, Mr. Rowley," wailed the old man, when Frank responded to the call, "I wish you would come out here right away. The master has been acting very queerly of late, and to-day he has locked himself in his laboratory and will not answer my knocks."

"Why don't you break in the door?" asked Frank, looking through the window at the snow storm that still raged.

"I thought of that, Mr. Rowley, but it is of oak and very thick. Besides, it is bound with steel or iron straps and is beyond my powers."

"Why not call the police?" growled Frank. He did not relish the idea of a sixty or seventy-mile drive in the blizzard.

"Oh—no—no—no!" Old Thomas was panicky at the suggestion. "The master told me he'd kill me if I ever did that."

Before Frank could formulate a reply, there came a sharp gasp from the other end of the line, a wailing cry and a thud as of a falling body; then silence. All efforts to raise Leland's number merely resulted in "busy" or "line out of order" reports.

Frank Rowley was genuinely concerned. Though he had never been a close friend of Leland's, the two had worked on many a knotty problem together and were in daily contact during the nearly ten years that the older man had worked in the same laboratory.

"Say, Tommy," said Frank, replacing the receiver and turning to his friend, Arnold Thompson, who sat at an adjoining desk, "something has happened out at Leland's place in Sussex County. Want to take a drive out there with me?"

"What? On a day like this? Why not take the train?"

"Don't be foolish, Tommy," said Frank. "The place is eight miles from the nearest station, which is a flag stop out in the wilds. And, even if you could find a cab there—which you couldn't—there isn't a taxi driver in Jersey who'd take you up into those mountains on a day like this. No, we'll have to drive. It'll be okay. I've got chains on the rear and a heater in the old coupe, so it shouldn't be so bad. What do you say?"

So Tommy, who usually followed wherever Frank led, was prevailed upon to make the trip. He had no particular feeling for Leland, but he sensed an adventure, and, in Frank's company, he could ask for no more.

FRANK was a careful driver, and three hours were required to make the sixty-mile journey. Consequently, it was late in the afternoon when they arrived at the old DeBost estate. It had stopped snowing, but the drifts were deep in spots, and Frank soon found that the car could not be driven through the winding path from the road to the house. So

they left it half buried in a drift and proceeded on foot.

It was a laborious task they had undertaken, and, by the time they set foot on the dilapidated porch, even Frank, husky and athletic as was his build, was puffing and snorting from his exertions. Little Tommy, who tipped the scales at less than a hundred and twenty, could hardly speak. They both were wet to the waist and in none too good humor.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Tommy, stamping the clinging snow from his sodden trouser legs and shoes, "if it snows any more, how in Sam Hill are we going to get out of this place?"

"Rotten trip I let you in for, Tommy," growled Frank, "and I hope Leland's worth it. But, darn it all, I just had to come."

"It's all right with me, Frank. And maybe it'll be worth it yet. Look—the front door's open."

HE pointed to the huge oaken door and Frank saw that it was ajar. The snow on the porch was not deep and they saw that footprints led from the open door to a corner of the porch. At that point the snow on the railing was disturbed, as if a hurrying man had clung to it a moment before jumping over and into the drifts below. But the tracks led no further, for the drifting snow had covered all excepting a hollow where some body had landed.

"Thomas!" exclaimed Frank. "And he was in a hustle, by the looks of the tracks. Bet he was frightened while at the telephone and beat it."

They entered the house and closed the door behind them. It was growing quite dark and Frank searched for the light switch. This was near the door, and, at pressure on the upper button, the spacious old hall with its open staircase was revealed dimly by the single remaining bulb in a cluster set in the center of the high ceiling. The hall was unfurnished, excepting for a telephone table and chair, the chair having fallen to the floor and the receiver of the telephone dangling from the edge of the table by its cord.

"You must have heard the chair fall," commented Tommy, "and it sure does look as if Thomas left in a hurry. Wonder what it was that frightened him?"

The house was eerily silent and the words echoed awesomely through the adjoining rooms which connected with the hall through large open doorways.

"Spooky place, isn't it?" returned Frank.

AND then they were both startled into immobility by a rumble that seemed to shake the foundations of the house. Heavier and heavier became this vibration, as if some large machine was coming up to speed. Louder and louder grew the rumble until it seemed that the rickety old house must be shaken down about their ears. Then there came a whistling scream from the depths of the earth—from far underground it seemed to be—and this mounted in pitch until their ear-drums tingled. Then abruptly the sounds ceased, the vibration stopped, and once more there was the eery silence.

Rather white-faced, Tommy gazed at Frank.

"No wonder old Thomas beat it!" he said. "What on earth do you suppose that is?"

"Search me," replied Frank. "But whatever it is, I'll bet it has something to do with Leland's strange actions. And we're going to find out."

He had with him the large flashlamp from the car, and, by its light, the two made their way from room to room searching for the iron-bound door mentioned by Thomas.

They found all rooms on the first and second floors dusty and unused with the exception of two bedrooms, the kitchen and pantry, and the library. It was a gloomy and spooky old house. Floor boards creaked startlingly and unexpectedly and the sound of their footsteps echoed dismally.

"Where in time is that laboratory of Leland's?" exclaimed Frank, his ruddy features showing impatient annoyance, exaggerated to an appearance of ferocity by the light of the flashlamp.

"How about the cellar?" suggested Tommy.

"Probably where it is," agreed Frank, "but I don't relish this job so much. I'd hate to find Leland stiff down there, if that's where he is."

"Me, too," said Tommy. "But we're here now, so let's finish the job and get back home. It's cold here, too."

"You said it. No steam in the pipes at all. He must have let the fire go out in his furnace, and that's probably in the cellar too—usually is."

WHILE talking, Frank had opened each of the four doors that opened from the kitchen, and the fourth revealed a stairway that led into the blackness beneath. With the beam of his torch directed at the steps, he proceeded to descend, and Tommy followed carefully. There was no light button at the had of the stairs, where it would have been placed in a more modern house, and it was until they had reached the furnace room that they located a light fixture with a pull cord. An ordinary cellar, with furnace, coal bin, and a conglomeration of dust-covered trunks and discarded furniture, was revealed. And, at its far end, was the iron-bound door.

The door was locked and could not be shaken by the combined efforts of the two men.

"Have to have a battering ram," grunted Frank, casting about for a suitable implement.

"Here you are," called Tommy, after a moment's search. "Just the thing we are looking for."

HE had come upon a pile of logs, and one of these, evidently a section of an old telephone pole, was of some ten or twelve inches diameter and about fifteen feet long. Frank pounced upon it eagerly, and, supporting most of the weight himself, led the attack on the heavy oak door with the iron bands.

No sound from within greeted the thunderous poundings. Clearly, if Leland was behind that door, he was either dead or unconscious.

Finally the double lock gave way and Tommy and Frank were precipitated headlong into the brightly lighted room beyond. Recovering their balance, they took stock of their surroundings and were amazed at what they saw—a huge laboratory, fitted out with every modern appliance that money could buy. A completely equipped machine shop there was; bench after bench covered with the familiar paraphernalia of the chemical and physical laboratory; huge retorts and stills; complicated electrical equipments; dozens of cabinets holding crucibles, flasks, bottles, glass tubing, and what not.

"Good Lord!" gasped Tommy. "Here's a laboratory to more than match our own. Why, Leland's got a fortune invested here!"

"I should say so. And a lot of stuff that our company does not even have. Some of it I don't know even the use of. But where is Leland?"

THERE was no sign of the man they had come to help. He was not in the laboratory, though the door had been locked from within and the lights left burning throughout.

With painstaking care they searched every nook and cranny of the large single room and were about to give up in despair when Tommy happened to observe an ivory button set into the wall at the only point in the room where there were no machines or benches at hand. Experimentally he pressed the button, and, at the answering rumble from under his feet, jumped back in alarm. Slowly there opened in the paneled oak wall a rectangular door, a door of large enough size to admit a man. From the recess beyond there came a breath of air, foul with

the musty odor of decayed vegetation, dank as the air of a tomb.

"Ah-h-h!" breathed Frank. "So that is where Ed Leland is hiding! The secret retreat of the gloomy scientist!"

He spoke half jestingly, yet when he squeezed his stalwart bulk through the opening and flashed the beam of his light into the darkness of a narrow passage ahead he was assailed with vague forebodings. Tommy followed close behind and spoke not a word.

THE passage floor was thick with dust, but the marks of many footsteps going and returning gave mute evidence of the frequency of Leland's visits. The air was heavy and oppressive and the temperature and humidity increased as they progressed along the winding length of the rock-walled passageway. The floor sloped ever downward and, in spots, was slippery with slimy seepage. It seemed that they turned back on their course on several occasions but were descending deeper and deeper into the heart of the mountain. Then, abruptly, the passage ended at the mouth of a shaft, which dropped vertically from almost beneath their feet.

"Whew!" exclaimed Frank. "Another step and I'd have dropped into it. That's probably what happened to Leland."

He knelt at the rim of the circular opening and looked into the depths of the pit, Tommy following suit. The feeble ray of the flashlight was lost in the blackness below.

"Say, Frank," whispered Tommy, "turn off the flash. I think I saw a light down there."

And, with the snapping of the catch, there came darkness. But, miles below them, it seemed, there was a tiny pin-point of brilliance—an eery green light that was like a wavering phosphorescence of will-o'-the-wisp. For a moment it shone and was gone. Then came the dreadful vibration they had experienced in the hall of the house—the whistling scream that grew louder and louder until it seemed they must be deafened. The penetrating wail rose from the depths of the pit, and the vibration was all around them, in the damp rock floor on which they knelt, and in the very air of the cavern. Hastily Frank snapped on the light of his flash.

"Oh boy!" he whispered. "Leland is certainly up to something down there and no mistake! How're we going to get down?"

"Get down?" asked Tommy. "You don't want to go down there, do you?"

"Sure thing. We're this far now, and, by George, we're going to find out all there is to learn."

"How deep do you suppose it is?"

"Pretty deep, Tommy. But we can get an idea by dropping a stone and counting the seconds until it strikes."

HE played the light of the flash over the floor and soon located a smooth round stone of the size of a baseball. This he tossed over the rim of the pit and awaited results.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Tommy. "It's not falling!"

What he said was true, for the stone poised lightly over the opening and drifted like a feather. Then slowly it moved, settling gradually into oblivion. Frank turned the flash downward and they watched in astonishment as the two-pound pebble floated deliberately down the center of the shaft at the rate of not more than one foot in each second.

"Well, I'll be doggoned," breathed Frank admiringly. "Leland has done it. He has conquered gravity. For, in that pit at least, there is no gravity, or at any rate not enough to mention. It has been almost completely counteracted by some force he has discovered and now we know how to follow him down there. Come on Tommy, let's go!"

And, suiting action to his words, Frank jumped into the mouth of the pit where he bobbed about for a moment as if he had jumped into a pool

of water. Then slowly he sank from view, and Tommy followed him.

IT was a most unique experience, that drop into the heart of the mountain. Practically weightless, the two young men found it quite difficult to negotiate the passage. For the first hundred or more feet they continued to bump about in the narrow shaft and each sustained painful bruises before he learned that the best and simplest method of accommodating himself to the strange condition was to remain absolutely motionless and allow the greatly weakened gravity to take its course. Each movement of an arm or leg was accompanied by a change in direction of movement, and contact with the hard stone walls followed. If they endeavored to push themselves from the contact the result was likely to be an even more serious bump on the opposite side of the shaft. So they continued the leisurely drop into the unknown depth of the pit.

Frank had turned off the flashlamp, for its battery was giving out and he wished to conserve its remaining energy for eventualities. Thus they were in Stygian darkness for nearly a half-hour, though the green luminosity far beneath them grew stronger with each passing minute. It now revealed itself as a clearly defined disc of light that flickered and sputtered continually, frequently lighting the lower end of the shaft with an unusual burst of brilliance. Remotely distant it seemed though, and unconscionably slow in drawing nearer.

"How far do you think we must drop?" called Tommy to Frank, who was probably fifty feet below him in the shaft.

"Well, I figure we have fallen about a thousand feet so far," came the reply, "and my guess is that we are about one third of the way down."

"Then this shaft is over a half-mile deep, you think?"

"Yes, at least a thousand yards, I should say. And I hope his gravity neutralizing machinery doesn't quit all of a sudden and let us down."

"Me, too," called Tommy, who had not thought of that possibility.

THIS was no joke, this falling into an unknown region so far beneath the surface of good old mother earth, thought Tommy. And how they would ever return was another thing that was not so funny. Frank was always rushing into things like this without counting the possible cost and —well—this might be the last time.

Gradually the mysterious light became stronger and soon they could make out the conformation of the rock walls they were passing at such a snail's pace. Layers of vari-colored rock showed here and there, and, at one point there was a stratum of gold-bearing or mica-filled rock that glistened with a million reflections and re-reflections. The air grew warmer and more humid as they neared the mysterious light source. They moved steadily, without acceleration, and Frank estimated the rate at about forty feet a minute. Then, with blinding suddenness, the light was immediately below and they drifted into a tremendous cavern that was illuminated by its glow.

Directly beneath the lower end of the shaft through which they had passed, there was a glowing disc of metal about fifteen feet in diameter. They drifted to its surface and sprawled awkwardly where they fell. Scrambling to gain a footing, they bounced and floated about like toy balloons before realizing that it would be necessary to creep slowly from the influence of that repelling force which had made the long drop possible without injury. Gravity met them at the disc's edge with what seemed to be unusual violence.

AT first it seemed that their bodies weighed twice the normal amount, but this feeling soon passed and they looked about them with in-

credulous amazement. The metal disc was quite evidently the medium through which the repelling force was set up in the shaft, and to this disc was connected a series of heavy cables that led to a pedestal nearby. On the pedestal was a controlling lever and this moved over a quadrant that was graduated in degrees, one end of the quadrant being labeled "Up" and the other "Down." The lever now stood at a point but a very few degrees from the center or "Zero" mark and on the down side. Frank pulled this lever over to the full "Down" position and they found that they could walk over the disc with normal gravity.

"I suppose," said Frank, "that if the lever is at the other end of the scale one would fall upward with full gravity acceleration — reversed. At zero, gravity is exactly neutralized, and the intermediate positions are useful in conveying materials or human beings up and down the shaft as desired. Very clever; but what is the reason for it all?"

In the precise center of the great cavern there was a dome or hemisphere of polished metal, and it was from this dome that the eery light emanated. At times, when the light died down, this dome gleamed with dull flickerings that threatened to vanish entirely. Then suddenly it would resume full brilliance, and the sight was marvelous beyond description. A slight hissing sound came from the direction of the dome, and this varied in intensity as did the light.

"Gosh!" said Tommy. "That looks like silver to me. And, if it is, what a wealthy man our friend Leland has become. He has spent his fortune well, even if he used it all to get to this."

"Yes, but where is he?" commented Frank. Then: "Leland! Leland!" he called.

HIS voice echoed through the huge vault and re-echoed hollowly. But there was no reply save renewed flickerings from the dome.

Leaving the vicinity of the gravity disc, the two men advanced in the direction of the shining dome, which was about a quarter-mile from where they stood. Both perspired freely, for the air was very close and the temperature high. But the light of the dome was as cold as the light of a firefly and they had no hesitancy in drawing near. It was a beautiful sight, this dome of silver with its flickering lights and perfect contour.

"By George, I believe it *is* silver," exclaimed Frank, when they were within a few feet of the dome. "No other metal has that precise color. And look! There is a wheelbarrow and some mining tools. Leland has been cutting away some of the material."

Sure enough, there was indisputable evidence of the truth of his statement. And the material was undoubtedly silver!

"Silver Dome," breathed Tommy, holding a lump of the metal in his hand. "A solid dome of pure silver—fifty feet high and a hundred in diameter. How much does that figure in dollars and cents, Frank?"

"Maybe it isn't solid," said Frank dryly, "though it's worth a sizeable fortune even if it is hollow. And we haven't found Leland."

THEY circled the dome twice and looked into every corner of the great cavern, but there was no sign of the man for whom they searched. The wheelbarrow was half filled with lumps of the heavy metal, and maul and drill lay where they had been dropped by the lone miner. A cavity three feet across, and as many deep, appeared in the side of the dome to show that considerably more than one wheelbarrow load had been removed.

"Funny," grunted Tommy. "Seems almost like the old dome had swallowed him up."

At his words there came the terrific vibration. The light of the dome died out, leaving them in utter darkness, and from its interior there rose the

mounting scream that had frightened old Thomas away. From so close by it was hideous, devastating; and the two men clung to each other in fright, expecting momentarily that the earth would give way beneath their feet and precipitate them into some terrible depth from which there could be no return.

Then the sound abruptly ceased and a gleam of light came from under the dome of silver. A crack appeared between its lower edge and the rocky floor of the cavern, and through this crack there shone a light of dazzling brilliancy—a warm light of rosy hue. Wider grew the opening until there was a full three feet between the floor and the bottom of the dome. Impelled by some irresistible force from within, the two men stumbled blindly to the opening, fell to the floor and rolled inside.

There was a heavy thud and the dome had returned to its normal position, with Frank and Tommy prisoners within its spacious hollow. The warm light bathed them with fearful intensity for a moment, then faded to a rosy glow that dulled their senses and quieted their nerves. Morpheus claimed them.

WHEN Frank awoke he found himself between silken covers, and for a moment he gazed thoughtfully at a high arched ceiling that was entirely unfamiliar. Then, remembering, he sprang from the downy bed to his feet. The room, the furnishings, his silken robe, everything was strange. His bed, he saw, was a high one, and the frame was of the same gleaming silver as the dome under which they had been trapped. The arched ceiling glowed softly with the same rosy hue as had the inner surface of the dome. A large pool of water invited him, the surface of the pool being no more than a foot below the point where it was built into the tile floor of the room. A large open doorway connected with a similar adjoining room, where he suspected Tommy had been taken. On his bare toes, he moved silently to the other room and saw that his guess had been correct. Tommy lay sleeping quietly beneath covers as soft as his own and amidst equal luxury of surroundings.

"Well," he whispered, "this doesn't look as though we would come to any harm. And I might as well take a dive in that pool."

Returning to his own room, he removed the silken garment with which he had been provided and was quietly immersed in the cool, invigorating water of the bath. His head cleared instantly.

"Hi there!" called Tommy from the doorway. "Why didn't you wake me up? Where are we, anyway?"

With dripping head and shoulders above the water, Frank was compelled to laugh at the sleepy-eyed, wondering expression on the blue-jowled face of his friend. "Thought you were dead to the world," he returned, "you old sleepy-head. And I don't know where we are, excepting that it is somewhere under the silver dome. What's more, I don't much care. You should get into this water. It's great!"

SO saying, he dived to the bottom of the pool and stood on his hands, his feet waving ludicrously above the surface. Tommy sniffed once and then made a quick dash for the pool in his own room. He was not to be outdone by his more energetic partner.

A half-hour later, shaved and attired in their own garments, which had been cleaned and pressed and hung neatly in the closets, they settled themselves for a discussion of the situation. Having tried the doors of both rooms and found them locked from the outside, there was no other course open to them. They must await developments.

"Looks like Leland has quite an establishment down here inside the mountain," ventured Tommy.

"Hm!" snorted Frank, "this place is none of Leland's work. He is prob-

ably a prisoner here, as are we. He just stumbled on to the silver dome and was captured by whatever race is living down here beneath it, the same as we were. Who the real inhabitants are, and what the purpose of all this is, remains to be seen."

"You think we are in friendly hands?"

"These quarters do not look much like prison cells, Tommy, but I must admit that we are locked in. Anyhow, I'm not worrying, and we will soon learn our fate and have to be ready to meet it. The people who own this place must have everything they want, and they sure have some scientific knowledge that is not known to us on the surface."

"Wonder if they are humans?"

"Certainly they are. You never heard of wild beasts sleeping in beds like these, did you?"

TOMMY laughed as he examined the exquisite hand-wrought figures on the silver bedstead. "No, I didn't," he admitted; "but where on earth did they come from, and what are they doing here?"

"You ask too many questions," replied Frank, shrugging his broad shoulders. "We must simply wait for the answers to reveal themselves."

There was a soft rap at the door of Frank's room, where the two men were talking.

"Come in," called Frank, chuckling at the idea of such consideration from their captors.

A key rattled in the lock and the door swung open to admit the handsomest man they had ever set eyes on. He was taller than Frank by several inches, standing no less than six feet five in his thin-soled sandals, and he carried himself with the air for an emperor. His marble-white body was uncovered with the exception of a loin cloth of silver hue, and lithe muscles rippled beneath his smooth skin as he advanced to meet the prisoners. His head, surmounted by curly hair of ebon darkness, was large, and his forehead high. The features were classic and perfectly regular. The corners of his mouth drew upward in a benign smile.

"Greetings," he said, in perfect English and in a soft voice, "to the domain of Theros. You need fear no harm from our people and will be returned to the upper world when the time comes. We hope to make your stay with us enjoyable and instructive, and that you will carry back kind memories of us. The morning meal awaits you now."

SO taken aback were the two young Americans that they stared foolishly agape for a space. Then a tinkling laugh from the tall stranger set them once more at ease.

"You will pardon us, I hope," apologized Frank, "but this is all so unexpected and so unbelievable that your words struck me speechless. And I know that my friend was similarly affected. We place ourselves in your hands."

The handsome giant nodded understanding. "No offense was taken," he murmured, "since none was intended. And your feelings are not to be wondered at. You may call me Orrin."

He turned toward the open door and signified that they were to follow him. They fell in at his side with alacrity, both suddenly realizing that they were very hungry.

They followed in silent wonderment as Orrin led the way to a broad balcony that overlooked a great underground city—a city lighted by the soft glow from some vast lighting system incorporated in its vaulted ceiling high overhead. The balcony was many levels above the streets, which were alive with active beings of similar appearance to Orrin, these speeding hither and yon by means of the many lanes of traveling ways of which the streets were composed. The buildings—endless rows of them lining the orderly streets—were octagonal in shape and

rose to the height of about twenty stories, as nearly as could be judged by earthly standards. There were no windows, but at about every fifth floor there was an outer silver-railed balcony similar to the one on which they walked. The air was filled with bowl-shaped flying ships that sped over the roof tops in endless procession and without visible means of support or propulsion. Yet the general effect of the busy scene was one of precise orderliness, unmarred by confusion or distracting noises.

ORRIN vouchsafed no explanations and they soon reentered the large building of which the balcony was a part. Here they were conducted to a sumptuously furnished dining room where their breakfast awaited them.

During the meal, which consisted of several courses of fruits and cereals entirely strange to Frank and Tommy, they were tended by Orrin with the utmost deference and most painstaking attention. He anticipated their every want, and their thoughts as well. For, when Frank endeavored to ask one of the many questions with which his mind was filled, he was interrupted by a wave of the hand and a smile from their placid host.

"It is quite clear to me that you have many questions to propound," said Orrin, "and this is not a matter of wonder. But it is not permitted that I enlighten you on the points you have in mind. You must first finish your meal. Then it is to be my privilege to conduct you to the presence of Phaestra, Empress of Theros, who will reveal all. May I ask that you be patient until then?"

So friendly was his smile and so polished his manner that they restrained their impatience and finished the excellent breakfast in polite silence.

And Orrin was as good as his word, for, no sooner had they finished when he led them from the room and showed the way to the elevator which conveyed them to the upper floor of the building.

From the silver-grilled cage of the lift they stepped into a room of such beauty and magnificence of decoration that they gazed about them in wondering admiration. The paneling and mouldings were of hammered silver that gleamed with polished splendor in the soft rose glow of the hidden lights. The hangings were of heavy plush of deep green hue and bore intricate designs of silver thread woven into the material. At the opposite side of the room there was a pair of huge double doors of chased silver and on either side of this pretentious portal there stood an attendant attired as was Orrin, but bearing a silver scepter to denote his official capacity.

"Phaestra awaits the visitors from above," intoned one of the attendants. Both bowed stiffly from the waist when Orrin led the two young scientists through the great doors which had opened silently and majestically at their approach.

IF the outer room was astonishing in its sumptuousness of decoration and furnishing, the one they now entered was positively breath-taking. On every side there were the exquisite green and silver hangings. Tables, divans, and rugs of priceless design and workmanship. But the beauty of the surroundings faded into insignificance when they saw the empress.

A canopied dais in the center of the room drew their attention and they saw that Phaestra had risen from her seat in a deeply cushioned divan and now stood at its side in an attitude of welcome. Nearly as tall as Frank, she was a figure of commanding and imperious beauty. The whiteness of her body was accentuated by the silver embroidered and tightly fitted black vestments that covered yet did not conceal its charms. A halo of glorious golden hair surmounted a head that was poised expectantly alert above the perfectly rounded shoulders. The exquisite oval of her face was chiseled in features of

transcendent loveliness. She spoke, and, at sound of her musical voice, Frank and Tommy were enslaved.

"GENTLEMEN of the upper world," she said gently, "you are welcome to Theros. Your innermost thoughts have been recorded by our scientists and found good. With a definite purpose in mind, you learned of the existence of the silver dome of Theros, yet you came without greed or malice and we have taken you in to enlighten you on the many questions that are in your minds and to return you to mankind with a knowledge of Theros—which you must keep secret. You are about to delve into a mystery of the ages; to see and learn many things that are beyond the ken of your kind. It is a privilege never before accorded to beings from above."

"We thank you, oh, Queen," spoke Frank humbly, his eyes rivetted to the gaze of those violet orbs that seemed to see into his very soul. Tommy mumbled some commonplace.

"Orrin — the sphere!" Phaestra, slightly embarrassed by Frank's stare, clapped her hands.

At her command, Orrin, who had stood quietly by, stepped to the wall and manipulated some mechanism that was hidden by the hangings. There was a musical purr from beneath the floor, and, through a circular opening which appeared as if by magic, there rose a crystal sphere of some four feet in diameter. Slowly it rose until it reached the level of their eyes and there it came to rest. The empress raised her hands as if in invocation and the soft glow of the lights died down, leaving them in momentary darkness. There came a slight murmur from the sphere, and it lighted with the eery green flickerings they had observed in the dome of silver.

FASCINATED by the weaving lights within, they gazed into the depths of the crystal with awed expectancy. Phaestra spoke.

"Men from the surface," she said, "you, Frank Rowley, and you, Arnold Thompson, are about to witness the powers of that hemisphere of metal you were pleased to term 'Silver Dome.' As you rightly surmised, the dome is of silver—mostly. There are small percentages of platinum, iridium, and other elements, but it is more than nine-tenths pure silver. To you of the surface the alloy is highly valuable for its intrinsic worth by your own standards, but to us the value of the dome lies in its function in revealing to us the past and present events of our universe. The dome is the 'eye' of a complicated apparatus which enables us to see and hear any desired happening on the surface of the earth, beneath its surface, or an the many inhabited planets of the heavens. This is accomplished by means of extremely complex vibrations radiated from the hemisphere, these vibrations penetrating earth, metals, buildings, space itself, and returning to our viewing and sound reproducing spheres to reveal the desired past or present occurrences at the point at which the rays of vibrations are directed.

"IN order to view the past on our own planet, the rays, which travel at the speed of light, are sent out in a huge circle through space, returning to earth after having spent the requisite number of years in transit. Instantaneous effect is secured by a connecting beam that ties together the ends of the enormous arc. This, of course, is beyond your comprehension, since the Ninth Dimension is involved. When it is desired that events of the present be observed, the rays are projected direct. The future can not be viewed, since, in order to accomplish this, it would be necessary that the rays travel at a speed greater than that of light, which is manifestly impossible."

"Great guns!" gasped Frank. "This crystal sphere then, is capable of bringing to our eyes and ears the happenings of centuries past?"

"It is, my dear Frank," said Phaestra, "and I would that I were able to describe the process more clearly." She smiled, and in the unearthly light of the sphere she appeared more beautiful than before, if such a thing were possible.

On the pedestal which supported the sphere there was a glittering array of dials and levers. Several of these controls were now adjusted by Phaestra, the delicate motions of her tapered fingers being watched by the visitors with intense admiration. There came a change in the note of the sphere, a steadying of the flickerings within.

"Behold!" exclaimed Phaestra.

THEY gazed into the depths of the sphere and lost all sense of detachment from the scene depicted therein. It seemed they were at a point several thousand miles from the surface of a planet. A great continent spread beneath them, its irregular shore line being clearly outlined against a large body of water. Here and there the surface was obscured by great white patches of clouds that cast their shadows below.

"Atlantis!" breathed Phaestra reverently.

The lost continent of mythology! The fabled body of land that was engulfed by the Atlantic thousands of years ago—a fact!

Tommy glanced at Frank, noting that he had withdrawn his gaze from the sphere and was devouring Phaestra with his eyes. As if drawn by the ardor of his observation, she raised her own eyes from the sphere to meet those of the handsome visitor. Obviously confused, she dropped her long lashes and turned nervously to the controls. Tommy experienced a sudden feeling of dread. Surely his pal was not falling in love with this Theronian empress!

Then there came another change in the note of the sphere and once more they lost themselves in contemplation of the scene within. The surface of the lost continent was rushing madly to meet them. With terrific velocity they seemed to be falling. An involuntary gasp was forced from Tommy's lips. Mountains, valleys, rivers could now be discerned.

THEN the scene shifted slightly and they were stationary, directly above a large seacoast city. A city of great beauty it was, and its buildings were of the same octagonal shape as were those of Theros! There could be but one inference—the Theronians were direct descendants of those inhabitants of ancient Atlantis.

"Yes," sighed Phaestra, in answer to the thought she had read, "our ancestors were those you now see in the streets of this city of Atlantis. A marvelous race they were, too. When the rest of the world was still savage and unenlightened, they knew more of the arts and sciences than is known on the surface to-day. The mysteries of the Fourth Dimension they had already solved. Their telescopes were of such power that they knew of the existence of intelligent beings on Mars and Venus. They had conquered the air. They knew of the relation between gravity and magnetism but recently propounded by your Einstein. They were prosperous, happy. Then—but watch!"

Faint sounds of the life of the city came to their ears. A swarm of monoplanes roared past just beneath them. The streets were crowded with rapidly moving vehicles, the roof-tops with air-craft. Then suddenly the scene darkened; a deep rumbling came from the sea. As they watched in fascinated wonder, a great chasm opened up through the heart of the city. Tall buildings swayed and crumbled, falling into heaps of twisted metal and crushed masonry and burying hundreds of the populace in their fall. The confusion was indescribable, the uproar terrific, and within the space of a very few minutes the entire city was a mass of ruins, fully half of the

wrecked area having been swallowed up by the heaving waters of the ocean.

PHAESTRA stifled a sob. "Thus it began," she stated. "Trovus was first—the city you just saw—then came three more of the cities of the western coast in rapid succession. Computations of the scientists showed that the upheaval was widespread and that the entire continent was to be engulfed in a very short time. The exodus began, but it was too late, and only a few hundred people were able to escape the continent before it was finally destroyed. The ocean became the tomb of two hundred millions. The handful of survivors reached the coast of what is now North America. But the rigors of the climate proved severe and more than three-quarters of them perished within a few days after their planes landed. Then the rest took to the caves along the shore and for a while were safe."

She manipulated the controls once more and there was a quick shift to another coast, a rugged, wave-beaten shore. Closer they drew until they observed a lofty palisade that extended for miles along the barren waterfront. They saw a fire atop this elevation and active men and women at various tasks within the narrow circle of its warmth. A cave mouth opened at the brink of the precipice near the spot they occupied.

Then came a repitition of the upheaval at Trovus. The ocean rushed in and beat against the cliff with such ferocity that its spray was tossed hundreds of feet in the air. The earth shook and the group of people around the fire made a hasty retreat to the mouth of the cave. The sky darkened and the winds howled with demoniac fury. Quake after quake rent the rugged cliffs; huge sections toppled into the angry waters. Then a great tidal wave swept in and covered everything, cliffs, cave mouths and all. Nought remained where they had been but the seething waters.

"BUT some escaped!" exulted Phaestra, "and these discovered Theros. Though many miles of the eastern seaboard of your United States were submerged and the coastline entirely altered, these few were saved. Their cave connected with a long passage, a tunnel that led into the bowels of the earth. With the outer entrance blocked by the upheaval they had no alternative save to continue downward.

"They traveled for days and days. Some were overcome by hunger and fell by the wayside. The most hardy survived to reach Theros, a series of enormous caverns that extends for hundreds of miles under the surface of your country. Here they found subterranean lakes of pure water; forests, game. They had a few tools and weapone and they established themselves in this underground world. From that small beginning came this!"

Phaestra's slim fingers worked rapidly at the controls. The scenes shifted in quick succession. They were once more in the present, and seemed to be traveling speedily through the underground reaches of Theros. Now they were racing through a long lighted passage; now over a great city similar to the one in which they had arrived. Here they visited a huge workshop or laboratory; there a mine where radium or cobalt or platinum was being wrested from the vitals of the unwilling earth. Then they visited a typical Theronian household, saw the perfect peace and happiness in which the family lived. Again they were in a large power plant where direct application of the internal heat of the earth as obtained through deep shafts bored into the interior was utilized in generating electricity.

They saw vast quantities of supplies, fifty-ton masses of machinery, moved from place to place as lightly as feathers by use of the gravity discs, those heavily charged plates whose emanations counteracted the earth's attraction. In one busy laboratory they saw

an immense television apparatus and heard scientists discussing moot questions with inhabitant of Venus, whose images were depicted on the screen. They witnessed a severe electrical storm in the huge cavern arch over one of the cities, a storm that condensed moisture from the artificially oxygenated and humidified atmosphere in such blinding sheets as to easily explain the necessity for well-roofed buildings in the underground realm. And, in all the speech and activities of the Theronians, there was evident that all-pervading feeling of absolute contentment and freedom from care.

"What I can not understand," said Frank, during a quiet interval, "is why the Theronians have never migrated to the surface. Surely, with all your command of science and mechanics, that would be easy."

"Why? Why?" Phaestra's voice spoke volumes. "Here—I'll show you the reason."

AND again the scene in the sphere changed. They were on the surface and a few years in the past—at Chateau Thierry. They saw their fellow men mangled and broken; saw human beings shot down by hundreds in withering bursts of machine-gun fire; saw them in hand-to-hand bayonet fights; gassed and in delirium from the horror of it all.

They traveled over the ocean; saw a big passenger liner the victim of torpedo fire; saw babies tossed into the water by distracted mothers who jumped in after them to join them in death.

A few years were passed by and they saw gang wars in Chicago and New York; saw militia and picketing strikers in mortal combat; saw wealthy brokers and bank presidents turn pistols on themselves following a crash in the stock market; government officials serving penitentiary terms for betrayal of the people's trust; opium dens, speakeasies, sex crimes. It was a fearful indictment.

"Ah, no," said Phaestra kindly, "the surface world has not yet emerged from savagery. We should be unwelcome were we to venture outside. And now we come to the reason for your visit. You came in search of one Edwin Leland, a fellow worker at one time. Your motives are above reproach. But Leland came as a greedy searcher of riches. We brought him within to teach him the error of his ways and to beg him to desist from his efforts at destroying the dome of silver. He alone knew the secret.

"Then you followed him and we took you in for similar reasons, though our scientists found very quickly that your mental reactions were of entirely different type from Leland's and that the secret would be safe in your keeping. Leland remains obdurate. He threatens us with physical violence, and his reactions to the thought-reading machines are of the most treacherous sort. We must keep him with us. He shall remain unharmed, but he must not be allowed to return. That is the story. You two are free to leave when you choose. I ask not that you give your word to keep the secret of 'Silver Dome.' I know it is not necessary."

THE lights had resumed their normal glow, and the marvelous sphere returned to its receptacle beneath the floor. Phaestra resumed her seat on the canopied divan. Frank dropped to a seat on the edge of the dais. Tommy and Orrin remained standing, Tommy lost in thought and Orrin stolidly mute. The empress avoided Frank's gaze studiously. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes bright with emotion.

Frank was first to break the silence. "Leland is in solitary confinement?" he asked.

"For the present he is under guard," replied Phaestra. "He was quite violent and it was necessary to disarm him after he had killed one of my attendants with a shot from his automatic pistol. When he agrees to sub-

mit peacefully, he shall be given the freedom of Theros for the remainder of his life."

"Perhaps," suggested Frank, "if I spoke to him. . ."

"The very thing." Phaestra thanked him with her wondrous eyes.

A high pitched note rang out from behind the hangings, and, in rapid syllables of the language of Theros, a voice broke forth from the concealed amplifiers. Orrin, startled from his stoicism, sprang to the side of his empress. She rose from her seat as the voice completed it excited message.

"It is Leland," she said calmly. "He has escaped and recovered his pistol. I have been told that he is now at large in the palace, terrorizing the household. We have no weapons here, you see."

"Good God!" shouted Frank. "Suppose he should come here?"

HE jumped to his feet just as a shot rang out in the antechamber. Orrin dashed to the portal when a second shot spat forth from the automatic which must certainly be in the hands of a madman. The doors swung wide and Leland, hair disarranged and bloodshot eyes staring, burst into the room. Orrin went down at the next shot and the hardly recognizable scientist advanced toward the dais.

When he saw Frank and Tommy he stopped in his tracks. "So you two have been following me!" he snarled. "Well, you won't keep me from my purpose. I'm here to kill this queen of hell!"

Once more he raised his automatic, but Frank had been watching closely and he literally dove from the steps of the dais to the knees of the deranged Leland. As beautiful a tackle as he had ever made in his college football days laid the maniac low with a crashing thud that told of a fractured skull. The bullet intended for Phaestra went wide, striking Tommy in the shouder.

Spun half way around by the impact of the heavy bullet, Tommy fought to retain his balance. But his knees went suddenly awry and gave way beneath him. He crumpled helplessly to the floor, staring foolishly at the prostrate figure of Leland and at Frank, who had risen to his feet and now faced the beautiful empress of Theros. Strange lights danced before Tommy's eyes, and he found it difficult to keep the pair in focus. But he was sure of one thing—his pal was unharmed. Then the two figures seemed to merge into one and he blinked his eyes rapidly to clear his failing vision. By George, they were in each other's arms! Funny world—above or below—it didn't seem to make any difference. But it was a tough break for Frank—morganatic marriage and all that. No chance—well—

Tommy succumbed to his overpowering drowsiness.

THE awakening was slow, but not painful. Rather there was a feeling of utter contentment, of joy at being alive. A delicious languor pervaded Tommy's being as he turned his head on a snow white silken pillow and stared at the figure of the white-capped nurse who was fussing with the bottles and instruments that lay on an enameled table beside the bed. Memory came to him immediately. He felt remarkably well and refreshed. Experimentally he moved his left shoulder. There was absolutely no pain and it felt perfectly normal. He sat erect in his surprise and felt the shoulder with his right hand. There was no bandage, no wound. Had he dreamed of the hammer blow of that forty-five caliber bullet?

His nurse, observing that her patient had recovered consciousness, broke forth in a torrent of unintelligible Theronian, then rushed from the room.

He was still examining his unscarred shoulder in wonder when the nurse returned, with Frank Rowley at her heels. Frank laughed at the expression of his friend's face.

"What's wrong, old timer?" he asked.

"Why—I—thought that fool of a Leland had shot me in the shoulder," stammered Tommy, "but I guess I dreamed it. Where are we? Still in Theros?"

"We are." Frank sobered instantly, and Tommy noted with alarm that his usually cheerful features were haggard and drawn and his eyes hollow from loss of sleep. "And you didn't dream that Leland shot you. That shoulder of yours was mangled and torn beyond belief. He was using soft nosed bullets, the hell-hound!"

"Then how—?"

"TOMMY, these Theronians are marvelous. We rushed you to this hospital and a half-dozen doctors started working on you at once. They repaired the shattered bones by an instantaneous grafting process, tied the severed veins and arteries and closed the gaping wound by filling it with a plastic compound and drawing the edges together with clamps. You were anaesthetized and some ray machine was used to heal the shoulder. This required but ten hours and they now say that your arm is as good as ever. How does it feel?"

"Perfectly natural. In fact I feel better than I have in a month." Tommy observed that the nurse had left the room and he jumped from his bed and capered like a school boy.

This drew no sign of merriment from Frank, and Tommy scrutinized him once more in consternation. "And you," he said, "what is wrong with you?"

"Don't worry about me," replied Frank impatiently. Then, irrelevantly, he said "Leland's dead."

"Should be. I knew we shouldn't have started out to help him. But, Frank, I'm concerned about you. You look badly." Tommy was getting into his clothes as he spoke.

"Forget it, Tommy. You've been sleeping for two days, you know—part of the cure—and I haven't had much rest during that time. That is all."

"It's that Phaestra woman," Tommy accused him.

"Well, perhaps. But I'll get over it, I suppose. Tommy, I love her. But there's no chance for me. Haven't seen her since the row in the palace. Her council surrounds her continually, and I have been advised to-day that we are to be returned as quickly as you are up and around. That means immediately now."

"Good. The sooner the better. And you just forget about this queen as soon as you are able. She's a peach, of course, but not for you. There's lots more back in little old New York." But Frank had no reply to this sally.

THERE came a knock at the door and Tommy called, "Come in."

"I see you have fully recovered," said the smiling Theronian who entered at the bidding, "and we are overjoyed to know this. You have the gratitude of the entire realm for your part in the saving of our empress from the bullets of the madman."

"I?"

"Yes. You and your friend. And now, may I ask, are you ready to return to your own land?"

Tommy stared. "Sure thing," he said, "or rather, I will be in a few minutes."

"Thank you. We shall await you in the transmitting room." The Theronian bowed and was gone.

"Well, I like that," said Tommy. "He hands me an undeserved compliment and then asks how soon we can beat it. A 'here's your hat, what's your hurry' sort of thing."

"It's me they're anxious to be rid of," remarked Frank, shrugging his broad shoulders, "and perhaps it is just as well."

"You bet it is!" agreed Tommy enthusiastically, "and I'm in favor of making it good and snappy." He completed his toilet as rapidly as possible and then turned to face the downhearted Frank.

"How do we go? The way we came?" he asked.

"NO, Tommy. They have closed off the shaft that led from the cavern of the silver dome. They are taking no more chances. It seems that the shaft down which we floated was constructed by the Theronians; not by Leland. They had used it and the gravity disc to transport casual visitors to the surface, who occasionally mixed with our people in order to learn the languages of the upper world and to actually touch and handle the things they were otherwise able to see only through the medium of Silver Dome and the crystal spheres. Further visits to the surface are now forbidden, and we are to be returned by a remarkable process of beam transmission of our disintegrated bodies."

"Disintegrated?"

"Yes. It seems they have learned to dissociate the atoms of which the human body is composed and to transmit them to any desired point over a beam of etheric vibrations, then to reassemble them in the original living condition."

"What? You mean to say we are to be shot to the surface through the intervening rock and earth? Disintegrated and reintegrated? And we'll not even be bent, let alone busted?"

THIS time he was rewarded by a laugh. "That's right. And I have have gone through the calculations with one of the Theronian engineers and can find no flaw in the scheme. We're safe in their hands."

"If you say so, Frank, it's okay with me. Let's go!"

Reluctantly his friend lifted his athletic bulk from the chair. In silence he led the way to the transmitting room of the Theronian scientists.

Here they were greeted by two savants with whom Frank was already acquainted, Clarux and Rhonus by name. A bewildering array of complex mechanisms was crowded into the high-ceilinged chamber and, prominent among them, was one of the crystal spheres, this one of somewhat smaller size than the one in the palace of Phaestra.

"Where do you wish to arrive?" asked Clarux.

"As near to my automobile as possible," replied Frank, taking sudden interest in the proceedings. "It is parked in the lane between Leland's house and the road."

Tommy looked quickly in his direction, encouraged by the apparent change in his attitude. The scientists proceeded to energize the crystal sphere. They were bent upon speeding the parting guests. Their beloved empress was to be saved from her own emotions.

Quick adjustments of the controls resulted in the locating of Frank's car, which was still buried to its axles in snow. The scene included Leland's house, or rather its site, for it appeared to have been utterly demolished by some explosion within.

TOMMY raised questioning eyebrows.

"It was necessary," explained Rhonus, to destroy the house in obliterating all traces of our former means of egress. It has been commanded that you two be returned safely, and we are authorized to trust implicitly in your future silence regarding the existence of Theros. This is satisfactory, I presume?"

Both Tommy and Frank nodded agreement.

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" asked Clarux, who was adjusting a mechanism that resembled a huge radio transmitter. Its twelve giant vacuum tubes glowed into life as he spoke.

"We are," chimed the two visitors.

They were requested to step to a small circular platform that was raised about a foot from the floor by means of insulating legs. Above the table there was an inverted bowl of silver in the shape of a large parabolic reflector.

"There will be no alarming sensations," averred Clarux. "When I close the switch the disintegrating energy from the reflector above will bathe your bodies for a moment in visible rays of a deep purple hue. You may possibly experience a slight momentary feeling of nausea. Then—presto!—you have arrived."

"Shoot!" growled Frank from his position on the stand.

Clarux pulled the switch and there was a murmur as of distant thunder. Tommy blinked involuntarily in the brilliant purple glow that surrounded him Then all was confusion in the transmitting room. Somebody had rushed through the open door shouting, "Frank! Frank!" It was the empress Phaestra.

IN a growing daze Tommy saw her dash to the platform, seize Frank in a clutch of desperation. There was a violent wrench as if some monster were twisting at his vitals. He closed his eyes against the blinding light, then realized that utter silence had followed the erstwhile confusion. He sat in Frank's car—alone.

The journey was over, and Frank was left behind. With awful finality it came to him that there was nothing he could do. It was clear that Phaestra had wanted his pal, needed him—come for him. From the fact that Frank remained behind it was evident that she had succeeded in retaining him. A sickening fear came to Tommy that she had been too late; that Frank's body was already partly disintegrated and that he might have paid the price of her love with his life. But a little reflection convinced him that if this were the case a portion of his friend's body would have reached the intended destination. Then, unexplainably, he received a mental message that all was well.

CONSIDERABLY heartened, he pressed the starter button and the cold motor of Frank's coupe turned over slowly, protestingly. Finally it coughed a few times, and, after considerable coaxing by use of the choke, ran smoothly. He proceeded to back carefully through the drifts toward the road, casting an occasional regretful glance in the direction of the demolished mansion.

He would have some explaining to do when he returned to New York. Perhaps—yes, almost certainly, he would be questioned by the police regarding Frank's disappearance. But he would never betray the trust of Phaestra. Who indeed would believe him if he told the story? Instead, he would concoct a weird fabrication regarding an explosion in Leland's laboratory, of his own miraculous escape. They could not hold him, could not accuse him of murder without producing a body—the *corpus delicti,* or whatever they called it.

Anyway, Frank was content. So was Phaestra.

Tommy swung the heavy car into the road and turned toward New York, alone and lonely—but somehow happy; happy for his friend.

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Earth, the Marauder

PART TWO OF A THREE-PART NOVEL

By Arthur J. Burks

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

THE Earth was dying. Ever since Sarka the First, king of scientists, had given mankind the Secret of Life, which prolonged life indefinitely, the Earthlings had multiplied beyond all count, and been forced to burrow deep into the ground and high into the air in the desperate search for the mere room in which to live. There was much civil war. The plight of the children of men was desperate. Something had to be done.

Then Sarka the Third called the Spokesmen of the Gens of Earth around him, and proposed to them

Deep in the gnome-infested tunnels of the Moon, Sarka and Jaska are brought to Luar, the radiant goddess against whose minions the marauding Earth had struck in vain.

a new scheme which had come to him in his laboratory atop the Himalayas. He would swing the Earth from its orbit!—send it careening through space toward the Moon!—there to destroy its inhabitants and supplant them with a colony of Earthlings! And then they would surge on to Mars!

One by one the twelve Spokesmen, each the head and representative of the teeming trillions comprising his Gens, acceded. Even Dalis, the jealous rival of Sarka, finally gave his sulky consent.

So, under Sarka's commands, the Earth's hordes were mobilized; and in tune with the Master Beryl in Sarka's laboratory all the Beryls of the Earth vibrated, freeing the Earth from her age-old orbit and swinging her out towards the Moon.

The Gens of Dalis—the trillions of people who swore allegiance to him—would lead the attack on the Moon. When within fifty thousand miles, they darted out, clad only in their tight green clothing and the helmets that held the anti-gravitational ovoids,

which neutralized gravity for them and enabled them to instantly fly where they willed. Their only weapons were hand atom-disintegrators. And out from the Moon came mysterious aircars, with long clutching tentacles—the weapons of the Moon's minions! The war of the worlds was begun!

Yet Dalis, leader of the Gens that now engaged the Moon's aircars, was still in the laboratory with Sarka. For Dalis' treacherous mind coveted control of the Earth, and though the urge to lead his Gens into battle was tremendous, still he stayed, watching Sarka closely, waiting for the moment when he could trick Sarka and assume control.

And at the head of the Gens of Dalis was a woman, Jaska, whom Sarka loved. The Moon's aircars swept away the Gens of Dallas, and out from Earth poured the Gens of Cleric, who was Jaska's father. The newcomers fought desperately to save Jaska from the deadly clutches of the aircars.

Dalis could stand it no longer. He sped forth from the laboratory to reorganize his beaten Gens. Jaska flew for home; but behind her a single aircar, splashed with crimson, reached forth its tentacles to clutch her—and Sarka groaned with the agony of his impotence to help the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XI

Escape—and Dalis' Laughter

BUT Sarka was not to be so easily beaten. There still remained an infinite number of possible changes of speed by manipulation of ovidum by vibration set up by the Beryls, without which this flight from the beginning would have been impossible. But for two hours, while the white robed men of Cleric fought against the car of the crimson splashes to prevent the capture of the daughter of their Spokesman—and died by hundreds in the grip of those grim tentacles—Sarka was forced to labor with the Beryls until perspiration bathed his whole body and his heart was heavy as he foresaw failure. And failure meant death or worse for Jaska.

But at the end of two hours, while the men of Cleric fought like men inspired against the aircar of the crimson slashes, a cessation in the outward speed of the earth could be noted. At the end of three hours the body of Jaska, all this time fighting manfully to attain to landing place on the Earth, was at last bulking larger; but the tentacles of the aircar were groping after her, reaching for her, striving to catch and clasp her to her death.

The two Sarkas watched and prayed while the might of the Beryls, traveling at top speed, fought against the force of whatever was used by the Moon-men to compel the Moon to withdraw. Still the men of Cleric fought that single car, and died by hundreds in the fighting. White robed figures which became shriveled and black in the grip of those tentacles.

COUNTLESS of the men of Cleric deliberately cast themselves against those tentacles, throwing their lives away to give Jaska more leeway in her race for life.

"Will she make it, father?" queried Sarka in a whisper.

"If the courage and loyalty of her people stand for anything, she will make it," he replied.

On she came at top speed, and now through the micro-telescopes the Sarkas could see the agony of effort on her face, even through the smooth mask used by the people of Earth for flight in space where there was no atmosphere. Courage was there, and the will of never-say-die; and Jaska, moreover, was coming back to the man she loved. In a nebulous sort of way Sarka realized this, for though these two had not mated there was a resonant inner sympathy between them which had rounded into an emotion of overpowering force since Jaska had proved to Sarka that she was to be

trusted—that he had been something less than a faithful lover when he had mistrusted her, ever so little.

Closer now and closer, and at last the aircar of the crimson splashes was drawing away, losing in the race for life. It was falling back, as though minded to turn about and race back for the Moon, now a ball in the sky, far away, the outlines of its craters growing dim and misty with distance. Now the men of Cleric, those who remained, were breaking contact with the aircar, and forming a valiant rear-guard for the retreat of Jaska.

THROUGHOUT the Earth, as the Beryls fought with ever increasing speed to lower the rate of the earth's outward race from the Moon, was such a trembling, such a vibration induced by conflicting, alien forces as there had not been even in that moment when back there in its orbit, the Earth could have either been kept within its orbit, or hurled outward into space at the touch of a finger.

Now Jaska, surrounded by her father's men, was almost close enough to touch the Earth.

She made it, weak and weary, and rested for a moment while her father's men steadied her. Then, thrusting them aside, with gestures bidding them return to their Gens, she lifted into the air again, and fled straight for the laboratory of Sarka.

She entered tiredly through the exit dome, and all but collapsed into the arms of Sarka. Gently he removed her helmet of the anti-gravitational ovoid, noting as she leaned against him the tumultous beating of her heart. Then her gentle eyes opened and she whispered to Sarka.

"You trust me now?"

For answer he bent and kissed her softly on the lips—for the kiss, from the far distant time when the first baby was kissed by the first mother, had been the favored caress of mankind. Her face was transfigured as she read his answer in his eyes, and the touch of his lips. Then, remembering, fear flashed across her face. She straightened, and grasping Sarka by the hand, hurried with him into the observatory.

SHE took the seat in which Dalis had sat before he had gone out to the command of his Gens, studied for many minutes the battle in space between the two alien worlds.

"Dalis is winning," said the Elder Sarka quietly, "apparently!"

"The qualification is a just one," said Jaska softly. "'Apparently,' indeed! You will note now that, though men of the Gens of Dalis swarm all about the aircars, and even clamber atop them, no more are dying in the grasp of those tentacles? Is Dalis arranging a treacherous truce with the Moon-men?"

"I have been wondering about that," said Sarka softly, "for it is my belief that nothing not conducive to his own selfish interests would have forced Dalis to leave this place and take command of his Gens, as I had first ordered, unless he had schemes planned of which father and I could know nothing. Now that I think of it, Jaska, how did Dalis know our secret code of fingers?"

Jaska started, and turned a blanched face to Sarka.

"*Did* he know?" she cried. "Did he? If he did that proves a suspicion that I have entertained since the first moment when Dalis swept into the fight, and I sensed that alien signals were being flashed back and forth!"

"Flashed back and forth!" ejaculated Sarka. "How do you mean? That Dalis was somehow able to communicate with the Moon-men in their own language, or through their own signals?"

"WHY not? He knew our secret code, did he not? I never gave it to him, and I know that you did not. No, Dalis has some means, never discovered or suspected by you Sarkas, whereby he is able to under-

stand alien tongues and alien sign manuals!"

"That means," said Sarka the Elder in a dead voice, "that by forcing Dalis to go out at the head of his Gens. . . ."

"We have," interrupted Sarka the Younger, "placed a new weapon of treason in his hands! Dalis, at the very moment of contact with the aircars, loaded with Moon-men, broke in on their signals—they must have had some means of signalling one another—and communicated with them in their own way! Do you think it possible that, with all his Gens, he may go over to the Moon-men, form an alliance with them?"

For many moments no one dared to answer the question; yet, from what the Sarkas knew of him, it was not impossible at all. For Dalis was the master egotist always, and never overlooked opportunity to gain something for himself.

It was Jaska who broke the silence.

"Did you note carefully," she said, "those aircars which were partially destroyed by our ray directors and atom-disintegrators?"

The Sarkas nodded.

"Did you note that no men, formed like our own, no creatures of any sort whatever, fell from the cars?"

AGAIN the awesome silence, and the keen brains of the Sarkas wrestled with this vague hint of the uncanny.

"You mean, Jaska . . . you mean. . . ."

"That the occupants of aircars are part of the cars, but—Beings of the Moon! That they are either metal monsters endowed with brains or tiny creatures irrevocably attached to the cars themselves!"

"But how," said Sarka at last, "are we to be sure? I can understand what Dalis might do if the Moon-men granted his wish for an alliance with them. It is easy to to understand why his Gens would follow his lead, for with the Moon forced outward from the Earth faster than his Gens could retreat, there is but one direction for his Gens to go—toward the Moon! They would go to the Moon as captives and trust the keen brain of Dalis to gain the mastery, sooner or later, over the Moon-men. And then. . . ."

"And then—?" repeated Sarka the Elder.

"Then, Dalis has already been inspired by the speed with which those aircars travel! You will remember that he did not take kindly to leaving the Earth and making his abode on some other planet! But why could he not do so, combine forces and knowledge with the people of that planet—and then return to Earth in alliance with them?—after we have depleted our forces by placing a large portion of our people on Mars and Venus and Saturn?"

"Sarka, my son," said Sarka's father, "before we continue with our flight to Mars, we must know the truth! We must somehow learn exactly what is going on on the Moon! If you could reach the Moon, alone, undetected, and bring back a report. . . ."

FOR a moment he left it there, and the faces of all three were gray with worry and abysmal fear.

"I can't go bodily, father," said Sarka at last, "but you remember my secret exit dome, to the right of the observatory, from which I have never yet dared exit from this place for fear that it might cost me my life?"

Sarka the Elder nodded, while Jaska looked puzzled. Another evidence of the fact that Sarka had not always trusted her, for she knew nothing of a secret exit dome. Sarka's eyes, as he looked at Jaska, mutely asked her forgiveness, which she gave him with her smile.

"I remember, son, and now? . . ."

"Surely it is worth risking one's life to know what new menace looms over the children of men!"

"What is the use of this secret dome?" asked Jaska softly.

"It is merely an elaboration of the

regular exit dome, combined with certain phases of our atom-distintegrators, and the principle involved in the anti-gravitational ovoids. I step into the secret exit dome, garbed for flight Outside, and will myself to appear bodily in a certain place. It is instantaneous. I step into the dome, for example, and will myself to appear whole upon the Moon, and there I will appear!"

"You mean that during the period of transposition you are invisible?"

"Yes, invisible because non-existent, except for the essential elements of me, broken down by the secret exit dome, reassembled at the place willed in their entirety! I can't fly there, for a million eyes would see me approach! I must go in secret, as a spy, and wearing the clothing and insignia of a member of the Gens of Dalis!"

Silence in the observatory for a brief breathing space, and then Jaska spoke that speech out of the books of antiquity, which remains the classic expression of loyalty.

"Whithersoever thou goest, there will I go also!"

From the laboratory came a sudden burst of laughter, the laughter which all three recognized as the laughter of Dalis; but when they entered the place of the Revolving Beryl, there was no one there—and a feeling of dread, all encompassing, held them thralled for the space of several heartbeats. Dalis, they knew, was thousands of miles away, upon the Moon; yet here in the place of the Master Beryl they all three had just heard his sardonic laughter!

CHAPTER XII

Ashes of the Moon

THROUGH the micro-telescopes it was possible to see what had happened after Dalis had assumed command of the Gens of Dalis. For even though the Moon, in spite of the speed of the Beryls, was being forced further and further from the Earth, the eyes of the micro-telescopes picked out and enlarged details to such an extent that the battle seemed to be transpiring under the eyes of the beholders.

A terrific jumble, in which Earthlings and aircars were all tumbled together in mad chaos, a great mass of writhing, green-garbed figures. Infinite in number—in the midst of which were the gigantic aircars, like monster beetles being beset by armies upon armies of ants.

Then, by the time Jaska had seated herself in the observatory atop the Himalayas, to watch what developed, the battle seemed to be over, and the Moon-men had won. For the huge cars swung around between the myriads of the Gens of Dalis, and seemed to be herding them toward the Moon, as though they were prisoners.

Telepathically, Sarka and his father had been able to catch some hint of the thoughts of the Earthlings in the battle, and these thoughts had been tinged with doubt, fear and horror, so that even thus to receive them, by mental telepathy, was to feel the searing heat of their fear.

NOW, in the instant when the battle in Space seemed to be over and the Gens of Dalis were prisoners, the thought waves were no more, and a brooding silence took their place. Dalis, the Sarkas knew, possessed the power to mask his thoughts, for it was a power possessed in common by all the scientists of Earth. But the common people of his Gens did not posses that power. However, for the moment Sarka had forgotten an all important something: that, when people were outside the roof of the world, they were subservient to the will of a common commander to whom they had sworn allegiance.

If, therefore, Dalis could mask his own thoughts from the brains of men, he could also mask the thoughts of the people of his Gens, merely by willing it! So Sarka and his father and Jaska

could not know whether the Gens of Dalis had gone over in a body with him, in a truce with the people of the Moon, or whether they were dual prisoners—of Dalis and of the Moon-men!

More than ever was it necessary for someone to somehow reach the Moon and make a thorough investigation, discover just what Dalis was doing, what mischief he was hatching.

The secret exit dome seemed to be the answer.

"You can manage without me, father?" asked Sarka.

THE elder Sarka nodded.

"Of the other Spokesmen of Earth, went on Sarka, "I trust Gerd the most. Might I suggest that you bring him here, trust him in all details, and let him take my place wherever possible? Or, better still, keep Jaska here with you! I . I may not be able to return! I'll try to find a way, but—we can always communicate telepathically. Jaska. . . ."

"Jaska," said that young lady grimly, "goes with Sarka wherever Sarka goes!"

"But it may mean death! We can only guess at the cunning of the Moon dwellers! They may have been in secret communication with Dalis for centuries! Dalis, who somehow discovered our secret finger code, may also know of the secret exit dome, and the principle upon which it operates! If he does, he may know how to combat it! Perhaps that explains his laughter! Perhaps he heard and understood every word we spoke, hears and understands every word we speak now! Who knows? He may wait until I have passed through the secret exit dome, and then make it impossible for me to be reincarnated on the Moon—or elsewhere!"

"No matter," said Jaska softly, "wherever Sarka goes, there goes Jaska! It is useless to attempt to dissuade me, and it is time you learned that!"

In spite of himself Sarka smiled, and his father met his smile with a quizzical one of his own. Both men had the same thought.

"The eternal woman!" said Sarka the Elder. "No man has ever understood her—no man ever will! And all men are ruled by her!"

Sarka shrugged, and Jaska spoke again.

"Don't you think it is time we tried this new experiment?"

SARKA nodded, and his face was suddenly alight with the excitement which burned within him.

"First," he said, "we need accoutrements of the Gens of Dalis for two people!"

Jaska smiled.

"Forseeing that we might have need of such equipment, I had several complete outfits sent here when I took charge of the Gens of Dalis as its Spokesman!"

Two minutes later, arrayed in the green clothing of the House of Dalis, swathed in it from neck to toe, wearing their belts and the masks which were necessary to life in space where there was no atmosphere, the whole topped by the gleaming helmets whose skull-pans held the infinitesimally small anti-gravitational ovoids, Jaska and Sarka entered the secret exit dome, side by side.

On the breast and back of each showed the yellow stars of the Gens of Dalis. There was no hiding their identity otherwise, and if any of the Gens saw them, both would be immediately recognized—for Jaska had commanded the Gens, and Sarka was the world's greatest scientist, known to every human being. But they planned on carrying out their investigations by stealth.

"Father," said Sarka, "when the inner door is closed upon us, you have but to press the button to the right of the door. Press it when the light beside it glows red, which will indicate that we have willed ourselves to go to a certain destination!"

THE inner door closed upon Sarka and Jaska, and, hand in hand, side by side, their bodies glowing with knowledge of warm, sympathetic contact, they waited for a miracle which had never before been attempted.

"Are you afraid, beloved?" queried Sarka.

"When I am with you," she said softly, "I have no fear."

"Then face the outer door, and will to go wherever I will to take you!"

Side by side, hand in hand still, they faced the outer door, and Sarka willed:

"Let us appear together in a deserted spot, within sight but unseen, of the Moon crater from which those aircars were sent against us!"

A sudden blur, a cessation of all knowledge, and then. . . .

Sarka and Jaska stood side by side in a desolate expanse surrounded by bleak and appalling mountains of grotesque shape, in a light that was weirdly, awesomely blue. Their feet were invisible, deeply rooted in some soft, fine material which looked like snow.

After a swift glance around to see if anything lived or moved in this awful desolation, Sarka stooped and dipped up some of the fine stuff with his fingers, touched it to his lips.

THE material seemed to be fine blue ashes, and on his tongue it had a soapy savor. He peered at Jaska, whose eyes were glowing with excitemen, whose lips were parted with anticipation, and instantly he opened a mental conversation with her.

"We must speak with each other telepathically, but do not speak with me until I have explained to you how to mask your thoughts from all persons save the one with whom you hold converse! First, I love you! Second, let us see if, searching the sky, we can find the Earth!"

In a few brief, highly technical words, Sarka told his beloved how to talk with him in the manner which he had never before explained to her. They had used telepathy before, countless times, but they had not cared who heard—while now secrecy in all things was the prime essential for success, even for life.

When he had told her, and she replied, "I understand perfectly, and it seems quite easy," they turned and surveyed the heavens, out of which, by this new miracle of the secret exit dome, they had dropped to the face of the Moon.

Away across the space between worlds, its transfiguration plainly visible to the two, they could make out and identify the world from which they had come. Save that they knew themselves standing on the Moon, they would have thought, as far as appearances went, that the place where they had come was the Moon, many times enlarged. It seemed incredible that they had come so far in the twinkling of an eye; but that they had was proved by the fact of their physical presence.

"Look, Jaska!" said Sarka suddenly. "See how our Earth glows, as though it were afire inside!"

THEY stared at the great circular yellowish flame that he pointed out, and Sarka, always the scientist whose science was one of exactness, tried to estimate just where, on the Earth's surface, the glow was.

"Jaska," he said again, "that glow comes out of the heart of the Gens area which Dalis ruled! And no one lives there, since Dalis' Gens flew out to do battle! That's why we did not know of it before we left! That glow, somehow, beloved, is the cause of the outward-from-the-Earth journey of the Moon! First we must locate the Moon-source of the glow, and render it incapable of further forcing itself away! For do you realize that, unless we do so, we will never again see home?"

Jaska said nothing, but her eyes were troubled for a moment. Then she smiled again.

"What care I if I become a prisoner on the Moon, if you are with me?"

Sarka was just now realizing the wonder of this raven-haired woman whom, knowing her for half a century as he had, he had just known so little after all.

"If we seem in danger of discovery, Jaska," he said to her, "drop down instantly into the ashes, for if we are discovered by Dalis. . . ."

He left it there and, with a deep intake of breath, started away for the nearest and highest hill. They desired to walk, yet found walking almost impossible, as they could not keep their feet on the ground save by the exercise of a really incredible effort of will. So, despairing of keeping their feet in contact with the ashes, they flew just above them, heading for the nearest weird-looking ridge.

IN the strange light, which was oddly like moonlight in some painted desert of Earth, shapes were distorted and somehow menacing, colors were raw, almost bleeding—and distances that seemed, but a step required hours to traverse.

Ever and anon, as they traveled they looked back up at the Earth which was their home. It still was visible, though plainly smaller with distance, and for a time Sarka's heart misgave him; but he only clasped tigher the hand of Jaska and moved on.

They were just at the base of the first hill, which had now become a mountain of gloomy, forbidding aspect, when the first sound they had heard on the moon came to them. A sound that was a commingling of the laughter of Dalis, the barking of jackals of the olden times, the humming of a million Beryls revolving at top speed, and a strident buzzing such as neither had ever heard.

Had they been discovered? Was the sound a warning? They could not know; but as they stared at the crest of the hill, two long, snaky, waving things appeared above the crest, undulating, waving to and fro, as though questing for something. They crouched low in the white ashes at the base of the mountain, and waited, scarcely breathing.

CHAPTER XIII

The Lunar Cubes

FOR a long time Sarka and Jaska remained still, like sentinels, listening to the strange discord which seemed to emanate from behind the hill at whose base they crouched.

"Look!" said Sarka at last. "There against the sky, beyond and between those two waving tentacles! Note that column of light, scarcely lighter than the light which surrounds it everywhere? It looks like a massive column just lighter than everything around it, yet so little lighter that you have to watch closely to see it at all?"

Jaska stared for all of a minute, before she thought back her answer.

"I see it," she said.

"Note now whether it goes, as it reaches outward into Space!"

Jaska followed the mighty height of the thing, outward and outward, and then gasped.

"Sarka," she said, "its end touches the Earth in the very heart of that strange glow we spoke about!"

"Exactly!" And people of Earth know nothing about it, because it is invisible to them! It is only from Outside that the glow it makes against the Earth is visible! If we can divert its direction, or render it useless in any way, the Moon will no longer be thrust away by its force!"

A pause of indecision, then Sarka thought again:

"Let us go, Jaska! Keep behind me, right on my heels!"

Slowly, fighting against something that seemed determined to pull, or hurl, them outward from the surface of the Moon with each forward movement they made, they essayed the side of the hill, pausing at the end of what seemed like hours in a sort of hollow

just large enough to mask their bodies and stared over its edge into one of the craters of the Moon. Out of the depths of that crater came the discordant sounds, which now were almost deafening, and out of that crater too came the almost invisibly-bluish column whose outer tip touched the Earth.

RIGHT before them, so close that they all but rested in its shadow, was one of those monster aircars, its tentacles moving to and fro as though wafted into motion by some vagrant breeze. But since neither Sarka nor Jaska could feel the breeze, Sarka knew that it was life which caused the waving motion of those tentacles of terror.

"Note," he said to Jaska, "that there is a tiny trapdoor in the bottom of the aircar, and that the thing rests on a half-dozen of those tentacles!"

"I see," came Jaska's reply.

Jaska went on:

"Note the gleaming thing on the ground, right below the aircar? I wonder what it is?"

They studied the thing there, which seemed to be a huge jewel of some sort that glittered balefully in the eery light of the Moon. It was, perhaps, twice the size of an average man's torso, and was almost exactly cubical in shape. As Sarka studied the thing, he sensed that feeling flowed out of it—that the cube, whatever it was, was alive!

He tore his glance away from it, and realized that he accomplished the feat with a distinct effort of will—as though the cube had willed to hold his gaze, knew he was there. His eyes, peering around the inner slope of the crater—which dipped over, some hundreds of feet down, and plunged downward to some unknown depth—noted a broad, flat stone, off to his right; and around the rim of the crater he counted a full hundred of the aircars, all with their tentacles waving as if they belonged to sentient creatures.

BELOW each one, as he studied them and strained his eyes to make out details, he caught the baleful gleam of other cubes like the first he had seen. The aircars, it seemed, were either sentinels, at the lip of the crater, or were the dwelling places of sentinels—and the cubes were those sentinels!

It seemed absurd, but it came to Sarka in a flash that that was the answer, and his eyes came back to the first cube, because it was nearer and more easy to study.

"I will not be swayed by the will of the thing," Sarka told himself. "Nor will I allow it to analyze me! Jaska, do you do likewise!"

Beside him, Jaska shivered. He turned to look at her. Her face was coldly white, and her eyes were big with terror and fascination as she stared at that first cube, resting so balefully there under the first aircar.

He shook her, and she seemed to bring her eyes to his with a terrific, will-straining effort.

"Look at me!" he told her, telepathically. "Keep your eyes on me, for to look at the cube spells danger!"

But his own eyes went back to the thing, and he studied it closely. A cold chill raced through his body as he noted that its gleam was becoming dull, fading slowly out. It had gleamed brightly at first, and now was losing its sheen, fading away to invisibility. He thought he should be able, regardless of gleam or color, to see its outline; but its outline, too, seemed to be becoming faint, indistinct.

THEN, in a trice, it was gone, and a feeling of uneasiness, more compelling than he had ever known before, coursed through the soul of Sarka. Where had the cube gone? What was it? What was its purpose? He tore his eyes away from the spot where he had last seen it, and stared away to the shadow beneath the second nearest aircar, where he had glimpsed another of the cubes.

The cube there, too, was fading out.

"Sarka! Sarka! Look!" came to his brain the thoughts of Jaska.

Sarka turned and stared at her, and a feeling of fear for which he could not account at all took fast hold of him. The eyes of Jaska, wide and staring as they had been when he commanded her to look away from the cube under the aircar, were staring at that flat, table-like rock, off to his right.

There, almost in the center of the rock, a gleaming something was taking shape! Just a dull spot, in the center of the yellow glow; then the beginning of the outline of a cube. Then, all at once, the cube itself, gleaming and baleful!

Sarka gasped in terror. He had seen the cube vanish, its glow disappear, and now here it was, almost close enough to touch, on a rock beside him, gleaming and baleful as before! That it was the same cube he had seen under the first aircar, he somehow knew without being told. That it was a sentient *thing* he also knew, for now there was no mistaking the fact that, but for the presence in the little hollow of Jaska and Sarka, the cube would not have moved.

SWIFT as light, Sarka's right hand darted to his belt, where his ray director should be nestled against his need of it. And with his first movement, the cube's brilliance vanished instantly, the cube disappeared, and appeared again right before the face of Sarka, so close he could touch it! Yet he did not turn the ray director against it, nor did he extend his hand to touch the thing—because he was afraid to do so!

Even as the cube appeared before his eyes, thrice baleful and menacing in its close proximity, his eyes darted back to that broad flat rock, where the second gleaming cube now appeared!

"Great God, Jaska!" he sent mentally, "what does it mean?"

"These," she answered bravely back, "are Moon-soldiers! And, unless we manage not to appear furtive, we are undone!"

Still Sarka made no move, while other gleaming cubes appeared on the flat rock. Five other cubes appeared beside the first, at the rim of the hollow which held the forms of Jaska and Sarka. The cubes were closing on them, oddly like a squad of Earthlings in the olden times, advancing by rushes against an entrenched enemy!

The buzzing sound which they had first heard now seemed accentuated, but, instead of being outside of the listeners, seemed inside them, hammering against their very brains! Messages were being sent to them, or passed back and forth between and among the cube-men about them—and they hadn't the slightest idea how to make answer, know whether an answer was expected of them, or what the cube-men thought about them!

Since there was nothing else to do, they lay there, hands clasped, as children in the dark clasp hands, and waited for what might transpire.

SUDDENLY the discord from the inside of the crater ceased, and all was still, while it came to Sarka that the cube-men who stood before him were in grim communication with something invisible to Sarka and Jaska, somebody, perhaps, deep in the bowels of the Moon, over inside the crater.

They knew, those two, that the cube-soldiers were reporting their presence, and asking instructions; that the Moon had gone silent to listen, and that within a few moments their fate would be decided. What should they do?

In his hand Sarka held his ray director, with which he knew he could blast one or all of the cubes into nothingness. But still he held his hand, made no new move.

Something, however, had to be done, for the discord was starting again, growing in volume. It made Sarka think, oddly enough, of a deaf mute fighting for speech! Then came the first intelligible sound. . . .

A burst, from the depths of the crater, of sardonic laughter!

"Dalis!" said Sarka, and moved. While Sarka moved, Jaska held fast to his arm. Casting her fear to the winds, furious because of the laughter of Dalis, Sarka thrust his ray director back into his belt and stood upright.

Bending over he seized the first of the gleaming cubes and hurled it over the edge of the crater, saw it start plummetting down. But even before it fell out of sight within the crater its gleam had dulled until it was almost impossible to see the thing. Racing as though racing against time, Sarka caught up cube after cube and hurled them all after the first.

OUT of the crater there came no sound of heavy objects striking, though Sarka felt there should have, for the cubes were almost as heavy as a man.

Then his hair almost stood on end under his helmet, for under that first aircar, where he had first seen it, the initial cube was again gleaming into life!

The thing had dissolved while being hurled over the rim, and reformed in its proper place, its station as silent sentinel under the aircar!

These cubes then, were indeed sentinels—sentinels impossible to injure. Though no force had been used against Sarka and Jaska, Sarka had the feeling that they were powerless, and that here on the edge of a crater of the Moon awful forces were being mustered against them. Mustered slowly, sluggishly, yet surely, as though the mentality which mustered them knew them helpless, and that there was no need to hurry!

As for Jaska, she merely clung to Sarka and waited—trusting him no matter what might transpire.

On a blind chance, Sarka brought out his ray director again, turned its muzzle toward that invisibly-blue column, pressed with his fingers, moving the director back and forth.

Instantly the blue column seemed to break short off, while the broken upper portion started racing outward toward the Earth. Sarka watched it, and noted that the yellowish glow on the Earth, even as he watched, was fading out—disappearing!

"If the ray will smash the blue column, Jaska," he said, "it will also destroy its source! Come! We will go look for it!"

And, holding her hand tightly, he rose to his feet and strode boldly down the inner slope of the vast crater.

CHAPTER XIV

The Crater Gnomes

IT seemed to Sarka, as he moved down the inner slope of the crater, that the cubes were somehow making sport of him, laughing at him, though no hint of laughter or anything resembling laughter emanated from them.

But, shutting his lips grimly, holding fast to Jaska's hand, he proceeded on, reached the lower portion of the inner slope, where it dropped off into a seeming black abyss, and dropped, keeping to a safe speed because of the fact that both he and Jaska were attired for movement in the air—though their manner of aerial transportation could scarcely be called flying.

The anti-gravitational ovoids simply rendered ineffectual the law of gravity.

Down they dropped, endlessly it seemed, while all about them, growing gradually, a bluish glow began to make itself manifest. Sarka turned and looked at the face of Jaska, and noted that it—all her being—was glowing with this strange radiance.

He smiled at her, and she smiled back.

Looking down now, to what seemed still a vast depth, they could see figures moving, tiny, almost infinitesimal, about a great circular cone, out of the depths of which came that strange bluish column whose outer tip touched the Earth.

SOME inner sense warned Sarka not to touch that column, or to permit Jaska to do so. They dropped down beside it, while Sarka, for no reason that he could assign, once more took his ray director in his free hand and held it in readiness. It seemed so tiny and futile—so foolish for two people, one of them a woman—to go into the very heart of an alien world, against an unknown enemy, armed with such a tiny weapon. Two people against unguessed myriads, whose very nature was an enigma, even to Sarka.

Closer now appeared the bottom of the crater, whose floor seemed to be covered with something that looked like blue sand, or rock. From this bluish substance the glow which bathed the two Earthlings seemed to emanate.

The funnel of the crater had now given away to the immensities of space, in all directions, and the cold of outside was being replaced by a warmth which promised soon to be even uncomfortable.

Then, without a jar, the two landed at the bottom of the crater, side by side, close enough almost to that great cone to touch it. Out of the cone came that bluish column, to shoot up through the funnel down which the two had lightly dropped . . . and the motion of the — whatever it was — was accompanied by a muted moaning sound, like that of a distant waterfall.

They paused there, in amazement, taking stock of their surroundings. Huge tunnels, whose roofs were lost to invisibility in the bluish haze, whose extremities could only be guessed at, reached off in all directions. As far as the two could tell they were the only living souls within the crater, though both knew better.

Sarka had the feeling, and he knew Jaska shared it with him, that innumerable eyes were studying them, innumerable intellects were cataloguing them. And somehow he sensed the presence, somewhere near, of the traitor Dalis!

THEN that discordant sound again, breaking so swiftly that it fell upon the eardrums of Sarka and Jaska like the crack of doom. Out of the many tunnels, from all directions, came hordes of beings which would have made the nightmares of Paracelsus—first of the scientists of Earth—pale to insignificance.

Paracelsus had written and illustrated his nightmares. Had hinted of strange acts of flesh-grafting—as the grafting of legs on the head of man. He had spoken, and written about, ghastly operations, from which men came forth as part men, part spiders; part men, part scorpions, dogs, cats, crocodiles. . . .

Sarka thought, as his mind went back to those ancient books of his people in which still remained vestiges of the theories of Paracelsus, that somehow, in his dreams, Paracelsus must have visited the craters of the Moon.

These people . if they could be called people. . . .

They had heads like the heads of Earthlings, broad-domed of brow, lacking eyelashes or lids, so that their eyes were perpetually staring. They possessed no bodies at all, and their legs, thin and attenuated to the size of the wrists of average men, seemed to support the massive heads with difficulty!

From all directions they came, looking like spiders such as Sarka the First had described to Sarka, when Sarka had been a mere boy. They came on the floor, out of the tunnels; they dropped from the walls of the tunnels, and down from the invisible roofs, landing on the floor as lightly as feathers—and all converged on Jaska and Sarka.

They seemed to have no fear at all, but only a vast curiosity.

Closer and closer they came.

JASKA'S grip tightened on the hand of Sarka, for one of the creatures, with a spiderish leap, had jumped upon her, fastening its legs in her tight-fit-

ting costume, where he hung, his face within an inch or two of hers. His lidless eyes, unblinking, stared deeply into hers.

Others jumped up beside the first, and still others clambered over Sarka, until both Sarka and Jaska were covered by them, like beetles attacked by ants. But these strange gnomelike creatures, who did not fear these strangers, apparently meant them no harm.

Then, after a thorough scrutiny, began the strangest talking Sarka had ever heard. The crater-Gnomes seemed to communicate by making strange clucking sounds with their tongues, sounds which were unmusical and discordant, and which, as the Gnomes who stood back from them, because already the two were covered until no more could cling to Jaska or Sarka, joined in the speech—mounted in the cavern to a vast crescendo of sound.

Sarka knew then that this was the sound which had come out to them while they crouched at the crater rim. These were people of the Moon; but if these were Moon-men, what, or who, were those gleaming cubes?

"Stand perfectly still," Sarka mentally admonished Jaska, "they apparently mean us no harm!"

He had not spoke aloud, had not allowed his thought to reach any but Jaska; yet instantly the discordant clucking ceased, and the Gnomes were quiet, as though they politely listened to someone who had interrupted them, yet whose interruption they resented, or were curious about.

WONDERING how the creature would regard his action, Sarka reached forth and plucked away the first Gnome which had jumped upon Jaska, and placed him gently on the ground. The thing merely stared at Sarka with his lidless eyes, as though wondering at Sarka's meaning. Then his lips, which were triangular, rather than straight as those of Earthlings, began again that strange clucking.

Immediately the Gnomes which clung to Jaska and Sarka dropped away, and scuttled into the midst of the myriads that stood and watched. They did not understand the speech of these Earthlings, but they were unusually clever in comprehending the meaning of gestures.

"Hold fast to me, Jaska," thought Sarka toward her—and wondered anew as the Gnomes instantly ceased their clucking sounds—"for I am going to try an experiment."

Holding her hand still, he turned and strode straight toward the huge cone out of which rose the bluish column.

Instantly the Gnomes broke into a frightful clucking of tongues, a sound that mounted to ear-drum-breaking intensity, and in a trice, climbing over one another to get into position, they moved in between Sarka and the cone. So eager were they to bar his further progress that they stood atop one another, until the depth of them was as tall as Sarka standing upright.

Yet, though they plainly said to Sarka: "You must not approach the cone," they did not seem to be angry with their visitors, but only curious. Sarka looked at Jaska, noted how wanly she smiled.

Then he turned, and headed for the nearest of the monster tunnels.

INSTANTLY he detected a surprising eagerness in the renewed clucking of tongues, while the Gnomes raced ahead, behind, all about the two, capering like pet animals, showing these strangers the way into the tunnel.

As they entered it, Sarka tried to discover whence came the bluish glow. The floor seemed to be of bluish sandstone, though its color, too, might have been caused by the glow. It was warm, too, so warm that perspiration was breaking out on the cheeks of Sarka.

Whence came the glow? Apparently from the very walls of the tunnel, or its roof; but surely from somewhere, surely from some secret place, whence it was diffused all over.

"And Jaska," said Sarka, "the Moon, according to my father's researches, is literally honeycombed with craters like this one!"

Again, as he thought, that strange, sudden cessation of the clucking of the Gnomes. Whither were they leading them? It was plain to be seen that the Gnomes were heading for some destination, almost herding Sarka and Jaska toward it. Capering creatures, who behaved witlessly, yet were far from witless. If Sarka were not sadly mistaken, these were Moon-men—and women, too, perhaps, since he could not tell the sex of them—and those gleaming cubes were their outer guards, perhaps slaves.

If the cubes were really of metal—they had felt warm to Sarka's touch—then these Moon-men had gone further in science than Earthlings, as they had imbued at least some metals, or stones, with intelligence sufficiently advanced for them to perform actions independently of their masters' wills.

SARKA, too, was remembering another thing: that he had touched one of these Gnomes, to remove it from Jaska—and had felt a distinct shock that was patently electrical!

The bluish glow was increasing, becoming more soft and mellow, shading gradually into golden, as they advanced—shading still as they preceded until it was almost white, almost blinding, in its radiance.

Then, of a sudden, the clucking of the Gnomes ended, and the creatures ceased their capering, fell into something that might have been an ordered military formation, and with Jaska and Sarka in the midst of them, moved straight toward a broad expanse of the tunnel wall, in the face of which appeared three long lines, deeply cut in the shape of a triangle.

The Gnome who had first leaped upon Jaska advanced to the wall, paused with his face almost against the lower line of the triangle, and remained there, intently staring, while the other Gnomes remained mute and unmoving.

Stronger and stronger appeared the blinding light. Slowly the inner portion of the triangle began to give inward, like a door. And out of the opening came that blinding radiance.

As the triangular door stood entirely open, Sarka and Jaska stood in thunderstruck silence, staring like people bereft of their senses. For there, standing in the opening, the now white radiance itself a mantle to cover her, was a woman, unclothed save for the radiance, who might have been of the Earth, save that she was more beautiful than any woman of Earth.

Beside her the radiant beauty of Jaska paled, became wan and sickly.

But Sarka noted immediately her eyes, whose depths bewildered, amazed him. For in them he could see no expression, no feeling, but only abysmal cruelty. That she was Sarka's master, and Jaska's master, and master of all these Gnomes, became instantly apparent for telepathically she addressed Sarka.

"I am busy now. The Moon-people will hold you prisoners in the Place of the Blue Light, until I am ready to give you to the Cone!"

CHAPTER XV

The Place of the Blue Light

SO the Gnomes were Moon-people, masters of the Moon-cubes! And people and cubes were ruled by a woman who resembled a woman of Earth!

The Gnomes took them back the way they had come.

Where, Sarka wondered, were the people of the Gens of Dalis? And where was Dalis himself! Sarka was sure that, in those first discords which had come out of the crater, he had heard at least a hint of the laughter of Dalis.

And this woman clothed in radiance—who was she? And what? That she was a creature of the Moon, and yet resembled in all ways a woman of

Earth, save that she was more beautiful than any woman Sarka had ever seen, seemed almost impossible to believe. Yet he had seen her. So had Jaska, and as Sarka and Jaska, with the capering Gnomes still about them, were led away to a fate at which they could only guess, Sarka wondered at Jaska's silence and at the strange lack of expression on her face.

He pressed her hand, but somehow she failed to return the pressure, mystifying more than ever. This sudden coldness was not like Jaska.

Back they went through the vast cavern where the cone of the bluish column still moaned and murmured. Sarka moved as close to the cone as the Gnomes would permit, and peered up along the mighty length of the column. At its tip was still the Earth, like a star viewed from the bottom of a deep well.

Smaller, too, it seemed, which proved that Sarka's breaking of the blue column had been but momentary, that the column had almost instantly regained its contact with the Earth. What was its source, what the composition of the column?

AT the moment there could be no answer to the question. Now the Gnomes were escorting them into another tunnel, whose glow was even bluer than that which the two had experienced in the other tunnels. And the deeper they penetrated, the more distant from the cavern of the Cone, the deeper in color became that light.

Finally the Gnome who had mentally asked permission of the Radiant Woman to show her Jaska and Sarka paused before another expanse of wall, identical in appearance with that of the wall of the triangle from which the Radiant Woman had appeared.

This time the Gnome managed ingress by a strange clucking sound, with his triangular lips held close to the base-line of the triangle.

Now the door swung open; but the radiance which now came out was not clear white, as in the case of the outer door, but deeply, coldly blue. For the first time the Gnomes used force with their prisoners, thus proving to them that they were indeed prisoners. Their tiny feet caught at Sarka and at Jaska, and forced them through the door, which swung shut behind them.

Sarka looked at Jaska who, in this strange new light, had taken on the color of indigo, and smiled at her. She did not return his smile, but her eyes looked deeply, somewhat sorrowfully, into his. As though she asked him a question he could not understand, to which he could therefore give no answer.

SARKA was now conscious of the fact that the heat of their prison-house—whose character they did not as yet know—was becoming almost unbearable. They were alone, too, for the Gnomes had not entered the door of triangle. Sarka partially removed his life mask, and, testing the atmosphere of the place, found it capable of being breathed without the mask. He signalled mentally to Jaska to remove her mask, and when the girl had done so he took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

She accepted his caress, but did not return it, and her eyes still peered deeply into his.

"Well, beloved," he said, "I am terribly sorry. But I did not want you to come, because I was afraid that something of this sort would happen."

She did not answer.

"What is it, Jaska?" he said at last.

"What did you think of that woman?" she asked softly.

"Beautiful!" he said enthusiastically. "Fearfully beautiful! But did you see her eyes? She had no more mercy in her heart than if she were made of stone! And she hated us both the moment she saw us!"

"And you, Sarka—did you hate her, too?"

Sarka stared at her, not comprehending.

"I feel," he said, "that if we are ever to escape her, we must kill her, or render her incapable of retaining us!"

Then, of her own accord, Jaska placed her arms around Sarka, and gave him her lips. Her new behavior was as incomprehensible to Sarka as her former enigmatic expression had been. Wise in the ways of science was Sarka, but he knew nothing of women!

NOW, hand in hand again, they began a survey of their prison house. The bluish glow was unbearable to the eyes, and tears came unbidden and ran down the cheeks of the prisoners. In a minute or two, perspiration was literally bathing the bodies of the two. After a questioning exchange of glances, Sarka swiftly divested himself of his costume, stripping down to the gray toga of Earth's manhood. With a shrug, Jaska removed her clothing to her own toga, and the two suits Sarka carried under his arm.

They started ahead, exploring, then sprang back with a cry of fright. Sarka did not know whether it was Jaska or himself who had cried out; for just as they moved forward, a rent opened in the floor at their feet, and their eyes for a moment—they could stand no longer—peered into a bluely flaming abyss which, save for the color, reminded Sarka of the word pictures of Hell he had read in Earth's books of antiquity!

As the two stepped back, the rent in the floor closed instantly. Sarka had noted where the end of it had been, and started to detour, his eyes on the floor.

Over to his left the bluely glowing wall reached up to invisible immensity. But as he would have passed along the wall, the rent opened again, effectually barring his way.

Beyond the rent he could see a vast continuation of the cavern, and he felt that, could they only pass the rent, they might reach a place where the heat was not so unbearable, and they could stay and talk in comfort.

RELEASING Jaska, he stepped back and prepared to leap the spot where the rent had been. High he jumped, and far, surprised at the length of his own leap. He landed lightly, far beyond the area where the rent had been, and even as he landed, a rent opened again at his feet, thus effectually barring further progress!

"It could just as easily," he told himself, "have opened under my feet, and dropped me into the abyss!"

From behind him came the sudden sound of screaming. He whirled to look back, to see Jaska standing there, arms outstretched toward him, her eyes with with fear and horror, and as he stood watching she raced to him, unmindful of abysses that might open under her feet, and flung herself into his arms.

"Come back!" she moaned. "Come back! Don't you see? *They* don't wish you to explore further! We are in their power, and must simply await their pleasure, whoever or whatever they are! They see all we do!"

So they turned back, and stood against the door which held them prisoners; and the heat of the place seemed to enter into them, to gnaw at their very vitals. After a time Sarka found himself almost tearing at his throat, fighting for breath.

GASPING, the tears bathing their cheeks until even their tears and their perspiration would flow no more, they huddled now just inside the massive stone door, arms about each other, and almost prayed for death. Sarka at least prayed for death, for both of them; but Jaska prayed for a way of deliverance, prayed that herself and Sarka might somehow win free, and be together again.

Sarka, who knew little of women, marveled at the grandeur of her courage, and wondered that he really knew this radiant woman so little. He com-

pared her in his mind with the unclothed woman who had ordered them here as prisoners, and it came to him that Jaska was all perfection, all tender womanhood, while the Radiant Woman was a monster, without soul or compassion— a creature of horror who mocked God with her outward seeming of perfection.

Jaska read his thoughts, and smiled wanly to herself, and Sarka wondered how, suffering as he knew she must be suffering, she could find the courage to smile.

Then, for a time, the two became comatose, mastered by the blue heat, and in dreamlike imaginings wandered in strange fields which could only, to these two, have been racial memories, since neither had ever seen such fields. There were cool streams, all a-murmur, and breezes which cooled their suntanned cheeks. Water touched their tongues, and cooled their whole bodies as they gratefully imbibed it.

IN their wanderings, in which Sarka was a faun and Jaska a nymph, they talked together in a language which only these two comprehended—a language which dealt in figures of speech, a language which depended upon handclasps for periods, glances of the eyes for commas, and the singing of their hearts for complete understanding.

Then a cool breeze, cool by comparison, caressed their pain-distorted cheeks, and the Gnomes came in, found them lying there, and clucked endlessly as though wondering what to do with them.

From hand to tiny hand, their feet serving as hands, the Gnomes passed garments—garments of the Gens of Dalis, and clothed again the two whom the Place of the Blue Light had all but slain. Of that ghastly experiment Sarka retained but one real memory. . . .

That bluish light, in the midst of the abyss, shifting and swaying like blue serpents swimming in Hades . . . that bluish light of the Cone, which he had broken up for a brief moment by the use of his ray director. Was this bluish light in the abyss the source of the light in the Cone? If one were to destroy it at its source. . . .

The two regained consciousness completely as the triangular door closed behind Sarka and Jaska and the Gnomes, and they were taken into the refreshing coolness of the tunnel, led back again in the direction of the room where they had seen the Radiant Woman. Both Jaska and Sarka noticed that they were clothed in new clothing, and a shy blush tinged the cheeks of Jaska as her eyes met those of Sarka.

THIS time they entered the vast chamber of radiance behind the first triangular door, and were forced to their knees to do obeisance to the Radiant Woman, who sat on a gleaming yellow stone for dais! The guards who forced Sarka and Jaska to their knees, were clothed in the green of the Gens of Dalis, and Dalis himself, his face stern, but bearing no sign of recognition of these two, stood at the right hand of the Radiant Woman!

"You come to us as spies," the thought of the Radiant Woman impinged upon the brains of Sarka and of Jaska, "and as spies you should be given to the Cone. But if you swear eternal allegiance to me, to obey me in all things, to forego your allegiance to Earth, your lives will be spared! What say you?"

Boldly Sarka stared into the almost opaque eyes of the woman. Then his glance went to the face of Dalis.

"What," he asked boldly, in the language of Earth, "does the traitor Dalis say?"

"I have sworn allegiance to Luar, who addresses you, and am her ally in all things! I have but one addition to make to what she says: Jaska belongs to me!"

The sudden leering grin of Dalis was hideous.

Sarka peered at Jaska, framing his answer. But Jaska spoke first.

"For myself, O Dalis," she said swiftly, "I can answer in but one way. Return me to the Place of the Blue Light, and forget me there!"

Sarka smiled, while his heart leaped with joy.

"And I, O Luar," he said mentally to the Radiant Woman, "prefer death with Jaska, at the Place of the Blue Light, than life as a traitor to the world of my nativity!"

Instantly Luar began the clucking sound which was the language of the Gnomes, at the same time allowing her thoughts as she spoke to impress themselves upon the brains of the prisoners.

"Take them away! Take them to the Cavern of the Cone, and when they have suffered as much as such inferior beings are capable of suffering, thrust them into the base of the Cone!"

CHAPTER XVI

Cavern of the Cone

THE Gnomes had been bidden to take the prisoners to the Cavern of the Cone, but to the surprise of Sarka and Jaska, they were taken back to the Place of the Blue Light! This time the Gnomes entered the place with them, closing and securing the door behind them.

But the Place of the Blue Light had changed!

Now it had no floor of blue, as it had had before, but only a corridor perhaps wide enough to allow the passage of four grown men, walking side by side, while the abyss of which the two had got but the merest hint through the opening and closing rents filled all the center of the place!

The Gnomes seemed impervious to the unendurable heat, and these, moving together, one behind the other, one beside the other, one atop the other, formed a living wall between Sarka and Jaska and the rim of the flaming blue abyss, to protect them from the heat.

Yet through the bodies of this living wall of Gnomes, a wall which was higher than the heads of Sarka and Jaska, the heat forced its way to the prisoners, and burned them anew with its agony.

To what dread rendezvous were they going? Where, save for the few guards at the house of Luar, were the people of the Gens of Dalais? Sarka felt, somehow, that the answers to all these questions would soon be made manifest, and a feeling of exaltation he could not explain was possessing him as he advanced. Around the corridor, whose one side was the wall reaching up to invisibility, whose other side dropped off into the abyss, the Gnomes herded the prisoners.

THE leader of the Gnomes was again the Gnome who had first leaped upon Jaska to examine her curiously. Now, watching the lidless eyes of this being, Sarka fancied he could detect a hint of some expression. The Gnome was excited at some prospect, some climax which they were approaching. What? On and on they moved. The blue flames from the abyss, roaring in a way that neither of the prisoners had ever experienced, reached upward in searing tongues toward the invisible roof of this place.

Then, when they had progressed far from the door of entry, Sarka gasped at a new manifestation. Out of the abyss, some distance ahead, came a gleaming thing, something that had apparently evolved itself out of the flames of the abyss. Blue of color it was, because of the flames from the pit; but Sarka recognized it with a start which he could not suppress nor understand.

It was one of those cubes, such as he and Jaska had seen at the lip of the Moon-crater! As they approached, guided by the Gnomes, other cubes appeared out of the abyss, others in numbers swiftly augmented, until a veritable battalion of them had marshalled itself, there at the lip of the abyss.

STRAIGHT toward these cubes the Gnomes led Sarka and Jaska, and when they had reached the center of the group, they halted, forming a circle, still a wall to mask the prisoners from the heat of the abyss. The leader of the Gnomes stopped with his face, his lidless eyes, close to one of the cubes.

For a moment he paused thus, and Sarka felt sure that somehow the Gnome was holding thought converse with the cube; but, try as he might, he could find no meaning in the weird conversation for himself. It was oddly like listening to a conversation in a code beyond his knowledge.

Then the Gnome turned back to Sarka and Jaska. By a pressure of tiny feet, he tried to indicate that Sarka and Jaska should unclasp their hands. But they only clung the tighter, and now threw their arms about each other.

The Gnome desisted, much to the joy of the lovers, while Sarka studied the cubes, wondering what their mission was with Jaska and himself.

Slowly, together, the cubes began to lose their bluish glow, their cube shape —to vanish utterly.

In a trice, still locked in each other's arms, Sarka and Jaska saw the Gnomes through what appeared to be an even bluer haze. Besides, the heat of the abyss no longer tortured them, and their bodies were cooling in a way that was unbelievably refreshing.

"What is it, beloved?" whispered Jaska. "What is it?"

SARKA stared at the Gnomes, now in retreat, capering as they had first capered when the two had fallen into their hands, toward the door by which all had entered. Mystified, Sarka put forth his hand. It came in contact with something solid, and oddly warm, which stirred an instantly responsive chord in the brain of Sarka.

This feeling was the same as he experienced when he had lifted those cubes and hurled them into the crater —where they had dissolved in falling, and instantly reappeared, each under its own aircar!

"Jaska!" he explained. "Jaska! The cubes have dissolved themselves, and have reformed in the shape of a globe, as a protective covering about us, to protect us from the heat of the abyss! Apparently we are not to be killed at once! These cubes are slaves of the Gnomes, of whom Luar is ruler!"

They were indeed locked inside a globe, a globe whose integral parts were the cubes of their acquaintance; and the atmosphere of the interior was not uncomfortable, but otherwise. Sarka and Jaska were feeling normal for the first time since they had landed on the Moon. But what was the meaning of this strange imprisonment?

They were soon to know!

For the globe which enclosed them, moved to the edge of the flaming abyss, and dropped into the bluish glow! It did not drop heavily, like a falling object on Earth, but rather floated downward, right into the heart of the flames. At this new manifestation of the strangeness of science on the Moon, Sarka was at once all scientist himself, striving to find adequate answers for things which, from cause to effect, were entirely new to him. With Jaska still clasped close against him, he seated himself in the base of the globe and studied the area through which they were passing.

Blue flames which seemed to be born somewhere, an infinite distance below them; blue flames which he knew to be the element that, shot outward from the great cone, had forced the Moon away from the Earth.

No sound of the roaring flames came through the globe, but every movement of them was visible.

SARKA turned and peered through the bottom of the globe; but all he could see below were the flames, a molten indigo lake of them. Now, as they floated downward, the glow was giving away to lighter blue, to white,

almost pure white, like the radiance which covered Luar like a mantle.

Sarka felt himself on the eve of vast, important discoveries, and the scientist in him made him, for the moment, almost forget the woman at his side. Jaska, unbothered about anything, now that Sarka was at her side, regarded his expression of deep concentration with a tolerant smile.

Whiter now was the light, and faster fell the globe which held the two.

The color of the globe, now fallen below the area of blue, had taken on, chameleonlike, the color of the white flames that bathed it.

Then, apparently right in the center of a lake of white flames, though Sarka could see no solid place on which the globe had landed, the globe came to rest.

Now everything was plain to see, and Sarka studied his surroundings with new interest. He felt a mounting sensation of scalp-prickling horror.

For, scattered throughout the lake of white flames, in all directions, as far as the eye could reach—standing alone, suffering untold agonies, from the expressions on their faces—were people of the Gens of Dalis!

NO longer were they clothed in green and wearing on breast and back the yellow stars of their Gens. Now they were nude as they had come into the world and standing there, each was holding out hands in horror, to hold back myriads of the Gnomes, who would have forced them to submerge themselves in the white flames of the lake!

Was the Gens of Dalis being burned alive? What was the meaning of this?

For a moment, filled with horror, Sarka looked away from the spectacle. Off to his right, as he sat, he noted that the flames, which here seemed lighter than they had in high levels, were converging on a single spot toward the side of the lake of white flames—as smoke converges on the base of a chimney leading outward to the air!

He knew as he stared that he was gazing at the spot where the bluish column of the cone was born!

Shaking his head, he turned back to the mighty spectacle of this horrible thing that was being done to the people of the Gens of Dalis.

In his brain there suddenly crashed a thought whose source he could only guess at, whose meaning mystified him more than anything yet experienced. The thought might have emanated from Luar, or from Dalis. But the more he thought of the matter, the more he thought how the phrasing of the thought was like the telepathy of Sarka the Second, now thousands of miles away, upon the Earth. And this was the thought:

"If they fight the flames, the flames will destroy them! If they go into them freely, voluntarily, they will be rendered immune to heat and to cold, to life and to death. But it is better that they die, for Earth's sake!"

What did it mean?

SARKA thought of the radiant white light which perpetually bathed the person of Luar, and thought that he had somehow been given a hint of its source. If the Gens of Dalis were voluntarily bathed in the lake of white flames, would they become as Luar?

Somehow, though he knew that such bathing would save their lives, the idea filled him anew with horror. He found himself torn between two duties. If he sent his thought out there to the Gens of Dalis, people of Earth, his people, they would be saved, but might forever become allies of the people of the Moon. If Sarka did not tell them, they would die—and there were millions of them.

But his science had always been a science of Life, and it still was.

"Enter the flames!" he telephatically bade his people. "Enter the flames!"

But they did not heed him, and for the first time the atmosphere of the interior of the globe seemed filled with

savage, abysmal menace! Plain to Sarka was the meaning of that menace: The cubes which composed this globe were loyal to their masters, the masters to a mistress, Luar, and would countenance no meddling.

Likewise it was impossible, if the Gnomes willed it to the cubes, for Sarka to transmit his thoughts to the Gens of Dalis through the transparent walls of the globe!

They were prisoners, indeed, of Dalis and of Luar!

BUT could Sarka and Jaska turn their new-found knowledge to their own use? Sarka was thinking back, back to one of the ancient tomes of his people. It spoke, someplace, of a man who had got trapped in the heart of a seething volcano, where the heat of it had cured him of his illnesses, made him whole again, given him new youth and freshness.

But since the cubes could forestall his transmission of thought, and perhaps could read and understand thoughts, how was he to tell Jaska? How show her that a way of deliverance had been given into their hands, if they only possessed the courage to use it!

Again came that thought, which Sarka recognized as the telepathy of his father:

"Courage! You will win, and Jaska with you!"

Thoughts could come in to them then, but could not go out. Or did it mean that the cubes, or the masters of the cubes, did not care if the prisoners received messages from outside, because they knew themselves capable of frustrating anything the prisoners planned? Perhaps. More than likely that was it.

But, looking through the bottom of the globe, into the sea of white flames below, Sarka gripped more tightly his ray director, and tried to marshal the forces of his courage. There was surely some way of escape. Some way out of their strange predicament.

CHAPTER XVII

Casting the Die

SOMEHOW Sarka believed that this white radiance of the abyss held the secret of the omnipotence of Luar, if omnipotence she possessed. That she did seemed sure, else Dalis would not have been with her. Besides, she had asked Sarka and Jaska to swear allegiance to her. Yes the secret was here, in the heart of the lake of white flames.

It might have been the Moon Fountain of Youth, or of omnipotence. There was no telling, unless Sarka tried an experiment.

His fury at Dalis now knew no bounds, and he was conscious of a desire, too poignant almost to be borne, in some way to circumvent the archtraitor. For here in the craters of the Moon Dalis was working out a strange amplification of the scheme which he had, centuries before, proposed to Sarka the First. He was subjecting the people of his Gens to the white flames.

If they immersed themselves voluntarily, they became as Luar was, but still subservient to the will of Dalis—and, in his hands, invincible instruments of war! Dalis had doubtless already been bathed in the flames. Sarka was not sure, for in the home of Luar the white light was so blinding it would have been impossible to make sure that the white radiance clothed the others with Luar.

"That's it!" said Sarka to himself. "That's it! Dalis and those guards at the dais of Luar have already been subjected to the white flames! The rest who immerse themselves, voluntarily, come forth as Luar and Dalis! Who do not, die. Dalis' manner of forcing the survival of the fittest! His idea of the flood in grandfather's time, only now he causes his selection by flames instead of flood! He believes that only those worthy to survive, and to stand at his back in whatever he conceives to be his need, will guess the

secret of the immersion. The others will die!"

WHAT a terrible alternative, when Dalis could as easily have given the secret to all his people! Could have told them how to save themselves! But it was not Dalis' way. Here, in the beginning of what was to become a dual sovereignty of the Moon, Dalis had already taken thought on the matter of over-population, and was destroying the many that the few—the strongest, most ruthless—might survive! Hundreds of thousands, millions of the Gens of Dalis, stood at the door of life, and did not know how to enter, merely because Dalis withheld the key! And, pausing in terror before the flames, they died, when a step and a plunge would have saved them all!

"If he lives to be a million, if he lives through everlasting life," said Sarka to himself, "and does penance through a thousand reincarnations, Dalis can never atone for this wholesale destruction of humanity! But I . . . I wonder!"

Sarka realized the nicety of the revenge of Dalis upon Jaska and himself. Dalis had not given the secret to the prisoners, but by his use of the cubes, he had plunged them into the very heart of the horror, where they could see the suffering of the people of the Gens. Then, when they had seen and appreciated the horror of it all, they would follow the people of the Gens to death!

But Luar had spoken of thrusting them into the base of the Cone!

THEN they were not for the flames after all! How could it be done? The globe composed of the cubes had but to transport the prisoners to the base of the Cone, press against that base, and open to let the prisoners free—and in the heart of the white-blue column they would be hurled outward from the Moon, into space. The mere prospect of such horror caused the perspiration to break forth anew on the body of Sarka.

But there might be a way.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "if the Earth people in *this* crater could read my thoughts in spite of their agonies, if I could get my thought to them through the globe? I wonder if, reading my thoughts, they would obey?"

Bit by bit, as parts of a puzzle fall into place, he made his plan, and his heart beat high with excitement. Jaska bent before him to look into his eyes, and he knew that she was trying to read his face. She knew, wise Jaska, that this brilliant lover of hers was making a plan, and she believed in the sure success of it because it would be *his!*

She smiled at him, her courage high, and waited!

Holding the ray director between his body and that of Jaska, he took a terrible, ghastly chance. Dalis had known the secret sign manual of these two; but would the intelligence of the cubes comprehend it? He must take the chance, slender as it seemed. His free hand began to spell out, with all speed, the mad plan he had conceived.

"The white flames are harmless if one plunges into them voluntarily. Are you afraid to attempt it? No? Then unfasten your clothing, and have it so arranged that you can drop entirely out of it when I give you the signal, which will be a mere widening of the eyes, like this! You understand? We must go nude into the flames, so that they will bathe our whole bodies! But, when you slip out of your clothing, tear your anti-gravitational ovoid from the skull-pan of your helmet, and hold it in your mouth! Then depend upon me, and have no fear!"

"I have no fear," replied the fingers of Jaska. "I go to death with you if you wish—or to Life!"

FEELING the menace of the cubes almost gripping at his throat as he got into action, Sarka unfastened his

own clothing, ripped the ovoid from his helmet, placed it in his mouth. Then, looking at Jaska, he gave her the signal.

Instantly, at her nod, he brought forth the ray director, pressed it with his fingers, directing its muzzle toward the curve of the globe, swinging it around in a circle, cutting out the bottom of the globe of cubes.

The action must have been one of untold surprise to the cubes which made up the globe, for before anything could be done to stay the hand of Sarka, his ray director had cut out the bottom of the globe, and Jaska and himself, divested now of all clothing, had fallen from the globe.

Unbearable heat slashed and tore at them. They still held hands, and when their feet touched upon something solid, they were gasping with the unbelievable heat; and it was ripping at their lungs like talons of white hot steel. But, pausing not at all, Sarka raced ahead with Jaska, and dived straight into the lake of white flames.

As he dived he directed his thoughts toward the people of the Gens who stood, undecided, dying by slow inches, on their little oases in the lake. And this was the thought, which was a command.

"Plunge into the flames! They will not hurt you! Plunge in, and obey my commands, O people of the Gens of Dalis! I, Sarka, command that you obey me! Jaska, who commanded you at the will of Dalis, also commands. Gather with Jaska and me at the base of the Cone! You have but to follow the converging of the flames!"

TOGETHER the two plunged in, and it seemed all at once as though the fire had gone out of the white flames, for they were cool and soothing to the touch. Sarka could feel new life being borne in him, could feel himself revitalized, exalted, lifted to the heights. He suddenly experienced the desire to run, and shout his joy for all to hear. But reason held him. Not thus easily would Luar and Dalis, the traitor, give over their designs against these two.

But in the heart of the flames, they dropped down, while they turned their faces toward the base of the Cone, or where they thought the base to be, even as Sarka gave another command to the now invisible people of the Gens of Dalis.

"Hold your ovoids in your mouths and follow! Obey my will!"

They dropped now to what seemed to be cool flagstones, while above them showed an orifice in a wall, into which those tongues of flame were darting. They paused there, side by side, their faces radiant, and looked back the way they had come.

Coming out of the white flames, like battalions on parade, were the people of the Gens of Dalis—scores and hundreds of them, who had sensed and heeded the mental commands of Sarka. Like genii appearing out of the flames they came, to muster about Sarka and Jaska.

Then, when it seemed that no more were coming, Sarka turned to the base of the Cone, his face high shining with courage and confidence, and stepped straight into the flames that led into the Cone. Beside him came Jaska, while behind him came the people of the Gens of Dalais who dared to do as he had commanded.

They were sucked into the Cone like chips sucked into a whirlpool, and Sarka willed a last command as they entered:

"Quit the column at the lip of the crater, and muster about the aircars!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The People of Radiance

THE exaltation of Sarka knew no bounds, and looking into the eyes of Jaska, he knew she felt it, too. For her face was shining, and all of her, the wondrous shining brilliance of her, was bathed in the white radiance that mantled Luar. And now, since Jaska

too knew that radiance, her beauty was greater even than that of Luar. Sarka thrilled anew at the glory of her.

But even as he stepped into the base of the Cone, he stepped out of the blue column at the lip of the Moon-crater. Swift as light, and swifter, had been the the flight upward from the Cavern of the Cone; yet, so keen were his perceptions, he knew when he had passed through the chamber of the bluish glow, into which he and Jaska had first dropped upon arrival.

Now they were on the lip of the crater, and the people of the Gens who had followed him, were slipping out of the blue column, like insects out of a flame, and converging on the aircars whose tentacles still waved as they had when Sarka had last seen them.

Sarka looked at these people in amazement. To him there was a divinity now about their nudeness which nudity never before had suggested to him. For the people shone, and there was something glorious in those divinely white bodies. They reminded Sarka of his people's books of antiquity, and his childhood's pictures of angels. . . .

But the effect of those white flames! . . .

THERE was no explaining it. But Sarka felt that whatever he willed to do he could do; that whatever he wished for was his, whether it was his by right or no. He felt that he could move mountains, with only the aid of his hands. Looking at Jaska he conceived all sorts of new beauty in her, for she was the brightest, to him, of all the people who had passed through the lake of white flames, and been cleansed in their heat.

"No wonder Luar has mastered the Moon!" he cried to Jaska. "For when she was bathed in the white flames, her will is paramount!"

"But how, if she passes the people of the Gens of Dalis through the flames, will she retain her sovereignty?"

"Because Dalis, too, has passed through, and his will is the will of the Gens! They will obey him, and he has sworn allegiance to Luar, or given some sort of oath of fealty!"

"How strange that but one person on the Moon has been bathed in the white flames!"

"How do we know," Sarka almost whispered it, "that she is, originally, of the Moon? Does she not look too much like our people, to be from another world entirely?"

"I do not know, but . . . you mean . . . you mean. . .?"

"I scarcely know; but Dalis would swear allegiance to no man, much less to a woman, unless he knew that man, or woman, far better than he has had opportunity, in a matter of hours only, to know Luar!"

He left it there then, as he strode boldly, with Jaska by his side, to the nearest of the aircars.

AS he approached the car, the gleam cube beneath it seemed to gleam brighter and brighter, as though it echoed the radiance of Sarka. Sarka knew, studying this phenomenon, that he possessed at least a hint of the secret of Luar's omnipotence. There had been a hint before, but by now its meaning was clearer. The white flames, out of the heart of the dying Moon, gave new life, exaltation, not only to the bodies but to the brains of those who passed through it, and with their brains quickened, they possessed such knowledge as men of Earth, for ages, had wished to possess.

Transmutation of metals . . the ability, at will, to endow the higher, more selective metals with intelligence . . . and the ability to retain command of the intelligences thus endowed. This explained the power of Luar over the Gnomes, and the power of the Gnomes over the cubes—if they possessed that power.

But the Gnomes, what of them? What were they?

But for a space Sarka must await the

answer to that question, for there was little time. Already he knew that the tale of his ecape, and his taking over of a portion of the Gens of Dalis, must have gone like wildfire through all the crater, and from this crater, perhaps, had been transmitted to all the craters of the Moon. All the craters. . . .

THAT explained to him the absence from the lake of white flames, where he had seen so few, comparatively, of the people of Dalis' Gens. The Moon was honeycombed by such craters, and perhaps the white flame connected them all, made them all one. And Luar commanded all from her dais in this crater Sarka and his people were escaping. The millions of the Gens had been swallowed by the craters of the Moon, at command of Luar, acceded to by Dalis—and all over the Moon the very things which Sarka and Jaska had witnessed were taking place.

Even now, as Sarka raced for the aircar, and Jaska with him, he could feel a backward pulling that was well-nigh invincible. Someone was willing him to return, willing the Gnomes to pursue him, willing the cubes to refuse obedience to him; but he laughed and stepped to the aircar, passing by the nearest writhing tentacle as though he knew it possessed no power to harm him. The tentacle swept aside, and did not try to bar him, while he sent his will crashing against that brightly gleaming cube. "Into the aircar! We enter with you!"

The cube vanished instantly, and it seemed to Sarka that invisible hands caught at his feet, lifting him up through the trapdoor in the belly of the aircar, up and inside. The door swung shut, and in the forward end of the vast aircar gleamed the cube which had obeyed his command!

SARKA sent one thought careening outward from the aircar, a command to the cubes which stood watch beneath the other aircars.

"Obey the Radiant People, and through them, *me!*"

The light of the cube made the interior of the aircar as light as day, and Sarka was struck at once with another phenomenon. He could see through the sides of the car in any direction.

And what he saw filled him with a sudden fear!

Out of the crater poured myriads of the Gnomes, and up the sides of it came myriads of the gleaming cubes, all racing toward the cars.

"Get back! Get back!" he commanded the Gnomes and the cubes.

At the same time he issued his commands to the cube within his own car, and to the cubes which by now were inside the other aircars, realizing that the cubes themselves were the motive power of the aircars—and that his will was the will of these individual cubes.

"Fly at once! Fly outward at top speed toward the Earth!"

Instantly, as though a single signal had started all the cars, a dozen aircars rose majestically from the crater, while Sarka studied the Gnomes and the cubes in turmoil on the rim. He noted then, a strange circumstance: that when he commanded the Gnomes and the pursuing cubes to keep back, they hesitated, dazedly, as though they did not know whether to advance or to retreat; that when he merely watched them, they came on.

HE laughed aloud at this measuring of mental swords with Luar, and with Dalis. For he could sense the conflict very plainly. She commanded the Gnomes and the cubes to attack, he commanded them to retreat, and they remained undecided, like people drawn between two extremities, and uncertain which direction to take.

Upward, side by side now, floated the aircars of the Moon, and in the forepeak of each, one of the gleaming cubes, like — like anti-gravitational ovoids of the Moon! At the fast falling rim of the crater boiled the Gnomes and the cubes, stirring and tumbling,

hampered by their very numbers, as they tried to attack at will of Luar and retreated in confusion at the will of Sarka.

Then there was Jaska beside Sarka, her face fearful, as he pointed off across the gloomy expanse of the Moon.

From all sides, from all directions, from other craters which these two had not even seen, came scores and hundreds of the monster cars!

They had beaten Luar and Dalis but for a moment, then! Now, at her command, the countless other aircars were coming in to head them off, to fight them back to the surface of the Moon. It would be a race against time, and against death. But of at least a dozen of the aircars, Sarka was master, and he did not fear the issue. That strange exaltation which the white flames had given him filled him with a confidence that nothing could shake.

He shot a thought at the gleaming cube in the forepeak.

"Faster! Faster! There is no limit to your speed! Faster! Faster! Even faster!"

Instantly the Moon seemed literally to drop away beneath the dozen aircars which carried the Radiant People, while the aircars of Luar and of Dalis fell hopelessly behind.

Sure that they would win in this race now, since he was just beginning to realize the vastness of his power—the all-encompassing, all mastering power of the human mind and will, which the white flames of the Moon had made almost god-like—Sarka turned his eyes toward a coldly gleaming sphere in the star-spangled heavens ahead.

IT was the Earth, and it seemed ringed in flames! From its edges there seemed to shoot long streamers of yellow or golden flames, which broke into sunlike pinwheels of radiance at their tips. Something, there on the precious Earth, was decidedly wrong!

Instantly, telepathically, he sought to gain mental contact with his father.

"Father, we are coming!" he said, across those countless miles. "What is happening?"

For a full minute there was no answer. Then it came, feeble, broken, weighted with fear; but it was a thought-message, unmistakably, of Sarka the Second.

"Hurry, son! Hurry! For Dalis has indeed betrayed us! I could not maintain control of the Earth with the Beryls, for some strange catastrophe has destroyed all the Beryls in the area Dalis ruled! The shifting of positions of the Earth and the Moon has so altered the relative effects of the pull of gravity exerted by the planets that Mars has been brought into dangerous proximity to us and is already so close that her ether-lights are playing over us! Surely you must be able to see them! We have received messages, but as yet I have only been partially able to decode them! What I have decoded, however, presages catastrophe—for I am sure that Mars and the Moon are in confederation, and that the Moon-people have deliberately forced us into contact with her ally!"

Cold fear clutched at the throat of Sarka as he caught the message. He decided not to tell Jaska for the moment. He looked to right and left, at the aircars on either side of him, then issued his commands.

"Faster! Faster! Be prepared to land in the area of the Gens of Cleric, as close as possible to my laboratory!"

A strange, awesome sight, that flight of the rebels of Dalis' Gens from the Moon to the Earth—like gleaming stars across the void. Far out in Space they fled at terrific speed through almost utter darkness, but their light was still blinding, lighting the way.

(Concluded in the next issue)

The dock was covered with panic-stricken folk who had come in awful terror to watch. And all were slaves to The Master.

Murder Madness

CONCLUSION OF A FOUR-PART NOVEL

By Murray Leinster

CHAPTER XV

THE door of the car swung wide, and Ortiz's pale grim face peered in behind the blue steel barrel of his automatic. He smiled queerly as Jamison, with a grunt of relief, tapped Bell's wrist in sign to put away his weapon.

"Ah, very well," said Ortiz, with the same queer smile upon his face. "One moment."

He disappeared. On the instant there was the thunderous crashing of a weapon. Bell started up, but Jamison thrust him back. Then Ortiz appeared again with smoke still trickling from the barrel of his pistol.

"I have just done something that I have long wished to do," he observed coolly. "I have killed the chauffeur and his companion. You may alight, now. I believe we will have half an hour or more. It will do excellently."

He offered his hand to Paula as she stepped out. She seemed to shudder a little as she took it.

"I do not blame you for shuddering, Senorita," he said politely, "but men who are

Bell has fought through tremendous obstacles to find and kill The Master, whose diabolical poison makes murder-mad snakes of the hands; and, as he faces the monster at last—his own hands start to writhe!

about to die may indulge in petty spites. And the chauffeur was a favorite with the deputy for whom I am substituting. Like all favorites of despots, he had power to abuse, and abused it. I could tell you tales, but refrain."

THE car had come to a stop in what seeemd to be a huge warehouse, and by the sound of water round about, it was either near or entirely built out over the harbor. A large section near the outer end was walled off. Boxes, bales, parcels and packages of every sort were heaped all about. Bell saw crated air engines lying in a row against one wall. There were a dozen or more of them. Machinery, huge cases of foodstuffs. . . .

"The Buenos Aires depot," said Ortiz almost gaily. "This was the point of receipt for all the manufactured goods which went to the *fazenda* of Cuyaba, Senor Bell. Since you destroyed that place, it has not been so much used. However, it will serve excellently as a tomb. There are cases of hand grenades yonder. I advise you to carry a certain number with you. The machine-guns for the aircraft, with their ammunition, are here. . . ."

He was hurrying them toward the great walled-off space as he talked, his automatic serving as a pointer when he indicated the various objects.

"Now, here," he added as he unlocked the door, "is your vessel. The Master bought only amphibian planes, of late. Those for Cuyaba were assembled in this little dock and took off from the water. Your destruction up there, Senor Bell, left one quite complete but undelivered. I think another, crated, is still in the warehouse. I have been very busy, but if you can fuel and load it before we are attacked. . . ."

They were in a roofed and walled but floorless shed, built into the warehouse itself. Water surged about below them, and on it floated a five passenger plane, fully assembled and apparently ready to fly, but brand new and so far unused.

"I'LL look it over," said Bell, briefly.

He swung down the catwalk painted on the wings. He began a swift and hasty survey. Soot on the exhaust stacks proved that the motors had been tried, at least. Everything seemed trim and new and glistening in the cabin. The fuel tanks showed the barest trace of fuel. The oil tanks were full to their filling-plugs.

He swung back up.

"Taking a chance, of course," he said curtly. "If the motors were all right when they were tried, they probably are all right now. They may have been tuned up, and may not. I tried the controls, and they seem to work. For a new ship, of course, a man would like to go over it carefully, but if we've got to hurry. . . ."

"I think," said Ortiz, and laughed, "that haste would be desirable. Herr Wiedkind—No! *Amigo mio,* it was that damned Antonio Calles who listened to us last night. I found pencil marks beside the listening instrument. He must have sat there and eavesdropped upon me many weary hours, and scribbled as men do to pass the time. He had a pretty taste in monograms. . . . I gave all the orders that were needful for you to take off from the flying field. I even went there myself and gave additional orders. And Calles was there. Also others of The Master's subjects. My treason would provoke a terrible revenge from The Master, so they thought to prove their loyalty by permitting me to disclose my plan and foil it at its beginning.

"I would have made the journey with you to The Master, but as a prisoner with the tale of my treason written out. So I returned and changed the orders to the chauffeur, when all the Master's loyal subjects were waiting at the flying field. But soon it will occur to them what I have done. They will come here. Therefore, hasten!"

"We want food," said Bell evenly,

"and arms, but mostly we want fuel. We'll get busy."

HE shed his coat and picked up a hand-truck. He rammed it under a drum of gasoline and ran it to the walkway nearest to the floating plane. Coiled against the wall there was a long hose with a funnel at its upper end. In seconds he had the hose end in one of the wing fuel tanks. In seconds more he had propped the funnel into place and was watching the gasoline gurgling down the hose.

"Paula," he said curtly, "watch this. When it's empty roll the drum away so I can put another in its place."

She moved quickly beside it, throwing him a little smile. She set absorbedly about her task.

Jamison arrived with another drum of gas before the first was emptied, and Bell was there with a third while the second still gurgled. They heaped the full drums in place, and Jamison suddenly abandoned his truck to swear wrathfully and tear off his spectacles and fling them against the wall. The bushy eyebrows and beard peeled off. His coat went down. He began to rush loads of foodstuffs, arms, and other objects to a point from which they could be loaded on the plane. Ortiz pointed out the things he pantingly demanded.

In minutes, it seemed, he was demanding: "How much can we take? Any more than that?"

"No more," said Bell. "All the weight we can spare goes for fuel. See if you can find another hose and funnel and get to work on the other tank. I'm going to rustle oil."

He came staggering back with heavy drums of it. A thought struck him.

"How do we get out? What works the harbor door?"

ORTIZ pointed, smiling.

"A button, Senor, and a motor does the rest." He looked at his watch. "I had better see if my fellow subjects have come."

He vanished, smiling his same queer smile. Bell worked frantically. He saw Ortiz coming back, pausing to light a cigarette, and taking up a hatchet, with which he attacked a packing case.

"They are outside, Senor," he called. "They have found the signs of the car entering, and now are discussing."

He plucked something carefully from the packing box and went leisurely back toward the door. Bell began to load the food and stores into the cabin, with sweat streaming down his face.

There was the sound of a terrific explosion, and Bell jumped savagely to solid ground.

"Keep loading! I'll hold them back!" he snapped to Jamison.

But when he went pounding to the back of the warehouse he found Ortiz laughing.

"A hand grenade, Senor," he said in wholly unnatural levity. "Among the subjects of The Master. I believe that I am going mad, to take such pleasure in destruction. But since I am to die so shortly, why not go mad, if it gives me pleasure?"

HE peered out a tiny hole and aimed his automatic carefully. It spurted out all the seven shots that were left.

"The man who poisoned me," he said pleasantly. "I think he is dead. Go back and make ready to leave, Senor Bell, because they will probably try to storm this place soon, and then the police will come, and then. . . . It is amusing that I am the one man to whom those enslaved among the city authorities would look for The Master's orders."

Bell stared out. He saw a small horde of people, frantically agitated, milling in the cramped and unattractive little street of Buenos Aires' waterfront. Sheer desperation seemed to impel them, desperation and a frantic fear. They surged forward—and Ortiz flung a hand grenade. Its explo-

sion was terrific, but he had perhaps purposely flung it short. Bell suddenly saw police uniforms, fighting a way through to the front of the crowd and the source of all this disturbance.

"Go back," said Ortiz seriously. "I shall die, Senor Bell. There is nothing else for me to do. But I wish to die with Latin melodrama." He managed a smile. "I will give you ten minutes more. I can hold off the police themselves for so long. But you must hasten, because there are police launches."

HE held out his hand. Bell took it. "Good luck," said Ortiz.

"You can come—" began Bell, wrenched by the gaiety on Ortiz's face.

"Absurd," said Ortiz, smiling. "I should be murder mad within three days. This is a preferable death, I assure you. Ten minutes, no more!"

And Bell went racing back and found Jamison rolling away the last of the fuel drums and Paula looking anxiously for him.

"Tanks full," said Jamison curtly. "Everything set. What next?"

"Engines," said Bell.

He swung down and jerked a prop over. Again, and again. . . . The motor caught. He went plunging to the other. Minutes. . . . They caught. He throttled them down to the proper warming up roaring, while the air in the enclosed space grew foul.

ONCE more to the warehouse. Ortiz shouted and waved his hand. He was filling his pockets with hand grenades. Bell made a gesture of farewell and Ortiz seemed to smile as he went back to hold the entrance for a little longer.

"We're going," said Bell grimly. "Get your guns ready, Jamison, for when the door goes up."

He pressed on the button Ortiz had pointed out. There were more explosions and the rattle of firearms from the front of the warehouse. There was a sudden rumble of machinery and the blank front of the little covered dock rose suddenly. The sunlit waters of Buenos Aires harbor spread out before them. To Bell, who had not looked on sunlight that day, the effect was dazzling. He blinked, and then saw a fast little launch approaching. There were uniformed figures crowded about its bows.

"All set!" he snapped. "I'm going to give her the gun."

"Go to it," said Jamison. "We're—"

The motors bellowed and drowned out the rest. The plane shuddered and began to move. The sound of explosions from the back of the warehouse was loud and continuous, now. Out into the bright sunlight the plane moved, at first heavily, then swiftly. . .

Bell saw arms waving wildly in the launch with the uniformed men. Sunlight glittered suddenly on rifle barrels. Puffs of vapor shot out. Something spat through the wall beside Bell. But the roaring of the motors kept up, and the pounding of the waves against the curved bow of the boat-body grew more and more violent. . . Sweat came out on Bell's face. The ship was not lifting. . . .

BUT it did lift. Slowly, very slowly, carrying every pound with which it could have risen from the water. It swept past the police launch at ninety miles an hour, but no more than five feet above the waves. A big, clumsy tramp flying the Norwegian flag splashed up river with its propeller half out of water. Bell dared to rise a little so he could bank and dodge it. He could not rise above it.

He had one glimpse of blonde, astonished heads staring over the stern of the tramp as he swept by it, his wing tips level with its rail and barely twenty feet away. And then he went on and on, out to sea.

He began to spiral for height fully four miles offshore, and looked back at the sprawling city. Down by the waterfront a thick, curling mass of smoke was rising from one spot abut-

ting on the water. It swayed aside and Bell saw the rectangular opening out of which the plane had come.

"Ortiz's in there," he said, sick at heart. "Dying as he planned."

But there was a sudden upheaval of timbers and roof. A colossal burst of smoke. A long time later the concussion of a vast explosion. There was nothing left where the warehouse had been.

Bell looked, and swore softly to himself, and felt a fresh surge of the hatred he bore to The Master and all his works. And then filmy clouds loomed up but a little above the rising plane, and Bell shot into them and straightened out for the south.

FOR many long hours the plane floated on to southward, high above a gray ocean which seemed deceptively placid beneath a canopy of thin clouds. The motors roared steadily in the main, though once Bell instructed Jamison briefly in the maintenance of a proper course and height, and swung out into the terrific blast of air that swept past the wings. He clung to struts and handholds and made his way out on the catwalk to make some fine adjustment in one motor, with six thousand feet of empty space below the swaying wing.

"Carbureter wrong," he explained when he had closed the cabin window behind him again and the motors' roar was once more dulled. "It was likely to make a lot of carbon in the cylinders. O. K., now."

Paula's hand touched his shyly. He smiled abstractedly at her and went back to the controls.

And then the plane kept on steadily. Time and space have become purely relative in these days, in startling verification of Mr. Einstein, and the distance between Buenos Aires and Magellan Strait is great or small, a perilous journey or a mere day's travel, according to the mind and the transportation facilities of the voyager. Before four o'clock in the afternoon the coast was low and sandy to the westward, and it continued sterile and bare for long hours while the plane hung high against the sky with a following wind driving it on vastly more swiftly than its own engines could have contrived.

IT was little before sunset when the character of the shore changed yet again, and the sun was low behind a bank of angry clouds when the stubby forefinger of rock that Magellan optimistically named the Cape of the Eleven Thousand Virgins reached upward from the seemingly placid water. Bell swept lower, then, much lower, looking for a landing place. He found it eight or nine miles farther on, on a wide sandy beach some three miles from a lighthouse. The little plane splashed down into tumbling sea and, half supported by the waves and half by the lift remaining to its wings, ran for yards up upon the hard packed sand.

The landing had been made at late twilight, and Bell moved stiffly when he rose from the pilot's seat.

"I'm going over to that lighthouse," he said curtly. "There won't be enough men there to be dangerous and they probably haven't frequent communication with the town. I'll learn something, anyway. You two stay with the plane."

Jamison lifted his eyebrows and was about to speak, but looked at Bell's expression and stopped. Leadership is everywhere a matter of emotion and brains together, and though Jamison had his share of brains, he had not Bell's corroding, withering passion of hatred against The Master and all who served him gladly. All the way down the coast Bell had been remembering things he had seen of The Master's doing. His power was solely that of fear, and the deputies of his selection had necessarily been men who would spread that terror with an unholy zest. The nature of his hold upon his subjects was such that no honorable man

would ever serve him willingly, and for deputies he had need of men even of enthusiasm. His deputies, then, were men who found in the assigned authority of The Master full scope for the satisfaction of their own passions. And Bell had seen what those passions brought about, and there was a dull flame of hatred burning in his eyes that would never quite leave them until those men were powerless and The Master dead.

"YOU'LL look after the ship and Paula," said Bell impatiently. "All right?"

Jamison nodded. Paula looked appealingly at Bell, but he had become a man with an obsession. Perhaps the death of Ortiz had cemented it, but certainly he was unable to think of anything, now, but the necessity of smashing the ghastly hold of The Master upon all the folk he had entrapped. Subconsciously, perhaps, Bell saw in the triumph of The Master a blow to all civilization. Less vaguely, he foresaw an attempt at the extension of The Master's rule to his own nation. But when Bell thought of The Master, mainly he remembered certain disconnected incidents. The girl at Ribiera's luxurious *fazenda* outside of Rio, who had been ordered to persuade him to be her lover, on penalty of a horrible madness for her infant son if she failed. Of a pale and stricken *fazendiero* on the Rio Laurenço who thought him a deputy and humbly implored the grace of The Master for a moody twelve year old girl. Of a young man who kept his father, murder mad, in a barred room in his house and waited despairingly for that madness to be meted out upon himself and on his wife and children. Of a white man who had been kept in a cage in Cuyaba, with other men. . . .

BELL trudged on through the deepening night with his soul a burning flame of hatred. He clambered amid boulders, guided by the tall lighthouse of Cape Possession with the little white dwelling he had at its base before nightfall. He fell, and rose, and forced his way on and upward, and at last was knocking heavily at a trim and neatly painted door.

He was so absorbed in his rage that his talk with the lighthouse keeper seemed vague in his memory, afterward. The keeper was a wizened little Welshman from the Chibut who spoke English with an extraordinary mixture of a Spanish intonation and a Cimbrian accent. Bell listened heavily and spoke more heavily still. At the end he went back to the plane with a spindle-shanked boy with a lantern accompanying him.

"All settled," he said grimly, when Jamison came out into the darkness with a ready revolver to investigate the approaching light. "We get a boat from the lighthouse keeper to go to Punta Arenas in. He's a devout member of some peculiar sect, and he's seen enough of the hell Punta Arenas amounts to, to believe what I told him of its cause. His wife will look after Paula, and this boy will hitch a team to the plane and haul it out of sight early in the morning. With the help of God, we'll kill Ribiera and The Master before sunset to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI

BUT they did not kill The Master before nightfall. It was not quite practicable. Bell and Jamison started out well before dawn with a favorable wind and tide, in the small launch the wizened Welshman placed at their disposal. His air was one of dour piety, but he accepted Bell's offer of money with an obvious relief, and criticized his Paraguayan currency with an acid frankness until Jamison produced Argentine pesos sufficient to pay for the boat three times over.

"I think," said Jamison dryly, "that Pau—that Miss Canalejas is safe enough until we come back. The keeper is a godly man and knows we

have money. She'll be in no danger, except of her soul. They may try to save that."

Bell did not answer. He could think of nothing but the mission he had set himself. He tinkered with the engine to make it speed up, and set the sails with infinite care to take every possible advantage of the stiff breeze that blew. During the day, those sails proved almost as much of a nuisance as a help. The fiendish, sullen williwaws that blow furiously and without warning about the Strait required watching, and more than once it was necessary to reef everything and depend on the motor alone.

Bell watched the horizon ahead with smouldering eyes. Jamison watched him almost worriedly.

"Look here, Bell," he said at last, "you'll get nowhere feeling like you do. I know you've done The Master more damage than I have, but you'll just run your head into a trap unless you use your brains. For instance, you didn't ask about communications. There's a direct telegraph wire from Cape Virgins to Buenos Aires, and there's telephonic communication between the Cape and Punta Arenas. Do you imagine that the plane wasn't seen when it came in the Cape? And do you imagine The Master doesn't know we're here?"

BELL turned, then, and frowned blackly.

"I hadn't thought of it," he said grimly, "but I put some hand grenades in the locker, there."

"You damned fool!" said Jamison angrily. "Stop being bloodthirsty and use your head! You haven't even asked what I've done! I've done something, anyhow. That bundle I chucked in the bow has a couple of sheepmen's outfits in it. Lots of sheep raised around here. We'll put 'em on before we land. And like a good general, I arranged a method of retreat before we left B. A. There'll be a naval vessel here in two or three days. She's carrying a party of Government scientists. She'll anchor in Punta Arenas harbor and announce a case of some infectious disease on board. No shore leave, you see, and nobody from shore permitted on board her. And she has one or two damned good analytical chemists with a damned good laboratory on board her, too. It's a long gamble, but if we can get hold of some of The Master's poison. . . . Do you see?"

"Yes," said Bell heavily. "I see. But you haven't been through what I've been through. What I've done, fighting that devil, has caused men to be deserted after being enslaved. There's one place, Cuyaba. . . ."

His face twitched. That place was in his dreams, now. That place and others where human beings had watched their bodies go mad, and had been carried about screaming with horror at the crimes those bodies committed. . . .

"I'm going to kill The Master," he rasped. "That's all."

He settled down to his grim watch for the city. All during the cloudy, overcast day he strained his eyes ahead. Jamison could make nothing of him. In the end he had to leave Bell to his moody waiting.

THE morning passed, and midday, and a long afternoon. Three times Bell came restlessly back to the engine and tried to coax more speed out of it. But when darkness fell the town was still not in sight. They kept on, then, steering by the stars with the motor putt-putt-putting sturdily away in the stern. The water splashed and washed all about them. The little boat rose, and fell, and rose and fell again.

"That's the town," said Bell grimly.

It was eleven at night, or later. Lights began to appear, very far away, dancing mirage-like on the edge of the water. They grew nearer with almost infinite slowness. Two wide bands of many lights, with a darker space in which a few much brighter lights showed clearly. Presently a single red

light appeared, the Punta Arenas harbor light, twenty-five feet up on an iron pole. They passed it.

"Bell," said Jamison curtly, "it's time you showed some sense, now. We're going to find out some things before we get reckless. This town isn't a big one, but it always was a hell on earth. No extradition from here. It's full of wanted men. It's dying, now, from the old days when all ships passed the Straits before the Panama Canal opened up, but it ought to be still a hell on earth. And we're going to put on these sheepmen outfits, and put up at some low caste sailors' and sheepmen's hotel on shore, and find out what is what. In the morning, if you like—"

"In the morning," said Bell coldly, "I'm going to settle with The Master."

THEY found a small and filthy hotel, in a still filthier street where the houses were alternately black and silent and empty, and filled with the squalid hilarity most seaport towns can somehow manage to support. The street lamps were white and cold. The dirt and squalor showed the more plainly by their light. There were sailors from the few ships in harbor, and women so haggard and bedraggled that shrill laughter and lavish endearments remained their only allure. And Bell and Jamison plodded to the reeking place in which a half-drunk sheepman pointed, and there Bell sat grimly in the vermin infested room while Jamison, swearing wryly, went out.

He came back later, much later. His breath was strong of bad whiskey and he looked like a man who feels that a bath would be very desirable. He looked like a man who feels unclean.

"Give me a cigarette," he said shortly. "I found out most of what we want to know."

BELL gave him a cigarette and waited.

"Good thing you stayed behind," said Jamison. "I want to vomit. Why people go in hell holes for fun. . . . But I was very drunk and very amorous. Picked up a woman and fed her liquor. Young, too. Damnation! She got crying drunk and told me everything she knew. I gave her money and left. Punta Arenas is The Master's, body and soul."

"One could have guessed it," said Bell grimly.

"Nothing like it is," said Jamison. "Every living creature, man, woman, and child, has been fed that devilish poison of his. The keepers of the dives go fawning to his local officials for the antidote. The *jefe politico* is driven in his carriage to be cured when red spots form before his eyes. The damned place is full of suicides, and women, and—oh, my God! It's horrible!"

A humming, buzzing noise set up off in the night somewhere. It kept up for a long time, throttled down. Suddenly it seemed to grow louder, changed in pitch, and dwindled as if into the far, far distance.

"That's one of The Master's planes now, no doubt," said Jamison savagely, "going off on some errand for him. He uses this place practically as an experiment station. The human beings here are his guinea pigs. The deputies get a standardized form of the stuff, but he's got it worked out in different doses so he can make a man go mad in hours, if he chooses, instead of after a delay. I don't know how. And The Master—"

HE checked himself sharply. There were shuffling footsteps in the hall outside. A timid tap on the door. Jamison opened it, while Bell dropped one hand inconspicuously to a weapon inside his shapeless clothing.

The toothless and filthy old man who kept the hotel beamed in at them.

"*Senores*," he cackled, "*Vdes son de Porvenir, no es verdad?*"

Jamison hiccoughed, as one who has been out and been drunken ought to do.

"No, viejo," he rumbled tipsily, *"somos de la estancia del Señor Rubio. Vaya."*

The old man seemed to mourn that they did not come from the sheep ranches about Porvenir Bay. But he produced a bottle with a shaking hand, still beaming.

"Tengo muchos amigos en Porvenir," he chirped amiably, *"Y questa botella—"*

"Démela," rumbled Jamison. He reached out his hand.

"No mas que poquito!" said the old man, beaming but anxious as Jamison tilted it to his lips. *"Es visky de gentes. . . ."*

He beamed upon Bell, and Bell swallowed a spoonful and seemed to swallow vastly more. He lay back lazily while Jamison in the part of a tipsy sheepherder bullied the old man amiably and eventually chased him out.

"You're amused?" asked Jamison sardonically, when there were no more sounds outside. "Because I said you didn't want to meet the young senorita who loved you when she saw you downstairs? Well, Bell, if you used your brain you didn't swallow any of that stuff."

Bell started up. Jamison caught him by the shoulder.

"I'm not sure," he said sharply. "Of course not. But it's damned funny for a Spanish hotel keeper to give something for nothing, even when he seemed just to want to gossip about his friends. Here. Drink this water. It looks vile enough to take the place of mustard. . . ."

NEXT morning the hotel keeper beamed upon them both as they went out of the place. A slatternly, dark haired girl who leaned on his shoulder smiled invitingly at Bell. And Bell, in his character of a loutish sheepman from one of the ranches that dot the shores of the Strait, grinned awkwardly back. But he went on with Jamison.

"We separate," said Jamison under his breath. "We want to find where The Master lives, mostly, and then we want to find the laboratory where his stuff is mixed. We don't want to do any killing until that's settled. After all, the Trade has something to say!"

Bell nodded indifferently and began to wander idly about the streets, turning here and there as if moved by nothing more than the vaguest curiosity. But gradually he was working through the sections in which the larger buildings stood. Concrete structures, astonishingly modern, dotted the business section. But none of them had the air that would surround a place where a man with power of life or death would be. In a town the size of Punta Arenas there would be unmistakable evidences about The Master's residence, even if it were only that those who passed it did so hurriedly and with a twinge of fear.

THERE were prosperous men in plenty on the streets, mingled with deserting sailors, stockmen and farmers from the villages along the Strait, and even a few grimy men who looked like miners. But there is a lignite mine not far from the city, and a narrow gauge railroad running to it. Of the prosperous-seeming men, however, Bell picked out one here and there toward whom all passersby adopted a manner of cringing respect. Bell lounged against a pole and studied them thoughtfully. Men with an air of amused and careless scorn which only men with unlimited power may adopt. He saw one grossly fat man with hard and cruel eyes. The uniformed policemen drove all traffic abjectly out of the way of his carriage, and stood with lifted hat until he had passed. The fat man gave no faintest sign of acknowledgment.

"I wonder," said Bell slowly, and very grimly, "if that's The Master?"

And then a passerby dodged quickly past his shoulder, brushing against him, and walted humbly in the street. Bell turned. A party of men were tak-

ing up nearly all the sidewalk. There were half a dozen of them in all. And nearly in the middle was the bulky, immaculate, pigmented Ribiera.

Bell stiffened. But to move, beyond clearing the way, would be to attract attention. He backed clumsily off the curbing as if making way. . . .

And Ribiera looked at his face.

BELL'S hand drifted near his hidden weapon. But Ribiera looked neither surprised nor alarmed. He halted and chuckled.

"Ah, the Senhor Bell!"

Bell said nothing, looking as stupid as possible, merely because there was nothing else to do.

"Ah, do not deny my acquaintance!" said Ribiera. He laughed. "I advise you to go and look at the view over the harbor. Good day, Senhor Bell."

Laughing, he went off along the street. And Bell felt a cold horror creeping over him as he realized what Ribiera might mean. Ribiera had enentirely too much against him to greet him only, in a town where even the dogs dared not bark without The Master's express command. He had guards with him, men who would have shot Bell down at a nod from Ribiera.

Bell burst into a mad run for the waterfront. When the bay spread out before his eyes he saw what Ribiera meant, and something seemed to snap in his brain.

The plane in which he and Jamison and Paula had escaped in was floating out in the harbor. It was unmistakable. A larger, bulkier seaplane floated beside it. The buzzing in the air the night before. The arrival of the plane had been telephoned from Cape Virgins. Through a glass, perhaps, even its alighting had been watched. And a big seaplane had gone out to bring it back. Footprints in the sand would lead toward the lighthouse. There would be plenty of men to storm that, if necessary, to take the three fugitives. But they would have found only Paula. It was quite possible that the plane had only been sent for after Bell and Jamison had been seen to land in Punta Arenas. And Paula in The Master's hands would explain Ribiera's amusement perfectly.

BELL found Jamison looking unhurriedly for him. And Jamison glanced at his utterly white face and said softly:

"We want to get where we can't be seen, to talk. There's the devil to pay."

"No use hiding," said Bell. His lips seemed stiff. "Paula—"

"Hide anyway," snapped Jamison. He fairly thrust Bell into an alleyway between two houses and thrust two rounded objects beneath his loose fitting coat. "Two grenades. I have two more. The boat we came in is taken—"

"So is the plane," said Bell emotionlessly.

"And there is a sign, in English, posted where we tied it up. The sign says, *'The Senores Bell and Jamison may recover their boat on application to The Master, and may also receive news of a late traveling companion from him.'*"

"We're known," Bell told him—and amazingly found it possible to smile faintly—"Ribiera met me on the street and spoke to me and laughed and went on."

Jamison stared. Bell's manner was almost entirely normal again. Then Jamison shrugged.

"The sense of what you're saying," he observed wryly, "is that we're licked. Let us, then, go to see The Master. I confess I feel some curiosity to know just what he's like."

BELL was smiling. Being in an entirely abnormal state, he had a curious certitude of the proper course to adopt. He went up to a policeman and said politely, in Spanish:

"I am desired to report to The Master, himself. Will you direct me?"

The policeman abased himself instantly and trotted with them as a guide. And Bell walked naturally, now,

with his head up and his shoulders back, and smoked leisurely as he went, and the policeman's abasement became abject. All who walked with that air of amused superiority in Punta Arenas were high in the service of The Master. Obviously, the two men in these dejected clothes must also be high in the service of The Master, and had adopted their disguise for purposes into which a mere policeman and a slave of The Master should not dare enquire.

Jamison was rather grim and still. Jamison thought he was walking to his death. But Bell smiled peculiarly and talked almost gaily and—as Jamison thought—almost irrationally.

THEY came to a house set in a fairly spacious lawn behind a rather high wall. There was greenhouses behind it, and there were flowers growing as well as any flowers can be expected to grow in such high altitudes. It was an extraordinarily cheerful dwelling to be found in Punta Arenas, but the shuddering fear with which the little policeman removed his hat as he entered the gateway was instructive.

They were confronted by four other policemen, on guard inside the gate.

"Estos Señores—" began the abject one.

"Take us to The Master," commanded Bell in a species of amused and superior scorn.

"It is required, Senor," said the leader of the four on guard, very respectfully, "it is required that none enter without being searched for weapons."

Bell laughed.

"Does The Master manage things so?" he asked scornfully. "Now, where I am deputy no man would dare to think of a weapon to be used against me! If it is The Master's rule, though. . ."

The policeman cringed. Bell scornfully thrust an automatic out.

"Take it," he snapped. "And go and tell The Master that the Señores Bell and Jamison await his pleasure, and that they have given up their weapons."

The policeman scuttled toward the house. Bell smiled at his cigarette.

"Do you know, Bell," said Jamison dryly, in English, "I'd hate to play poker with you."

"I'm not bluffing," said Bell. "Not altogether. I've a four card flush, with the draw to come."

ALMOST instantly the policeman returned, more abject still. He had stammered out Bell's message, just as it was given him. And the slaves of The Master did not usually disobey orders, especially orders designed to prevent any danger of a doomed man or woman trying to assassinate The Master before madness was complete. Bell and Jamison were received by liveried servants in utter silence and conducted through a long passageway, too long to have been contained entirely in the house as seen from the front. Indeed, they came out into a great open greenhouse, in which the smell of flowers was heavy. There were flowers everywhere, and a benign, small old man with a snowy beard and hair, sat at a desk as if chatting of amiable trivialities with the frock-coated men who stood about him. The white haired old man lifted a blossom delicately to his nostrils and inhaled its perfume with a sensitive delight. He looked up and smiled benignly upon the two.

It was then that Jamison got a shock surpassing all the rest. Bell's hands were writhing at the ends of his wrists, writhing as if they were utterly beyond his control and as if they were longing to rend and tear. . . .

And Bell suddenly looked down at them, and his expression was that of a man who sees cobras at the ends of his arms.

CHAPTER XVII

THERE was a long pause. Bell was very calm. He seemed to tear his eyes from the writhing hands that

were peculiarly sensate, as if under the control of an intelligence alien to his own.

"I believe," said Bell steadily, "that The Master wishes to speak to me."

With an apparent tremendous effort of will, he thrust his hands into his pockets. Jamison cursed softly. Bell had taken the direction of things entirely out of his hands. It only remained to play up.

"To be sure," said a mild, benevolent voice. The man with the snowy beard regarded Bell exactly in the fashion of an elderly philanthropist. "I am The Master, Senor Bell. You have interested me greatly. I have grown to have a great admiration for you. Will you be seated? Your companion also pleases me. I would like"—and the mild brown eyes beamed at him—"I would like to have your friendship, Senor Bell."

"Pull out a chair for me, Jamison," said Bell in a strained voice. "And—I'd like to have a cigarette."

Jamison, cursing under his breath, put a chair behind Bell and stuck a cigarette between his lips. He held a match, though his hands shook.

"You might sit down, too," said Bell steadily. "From the manner of The Master, I imagine that the conversation will take some time."

HE inhaled deeply of his cigarette, and faced the little man again. And The Master looked so benevolent that he seemed absolutely cherubic, and there was absolutely no sign of anything but the utmost saintliness about him. His eyes were clear and mild. His complexion was fresh and translucent. The wrinkles that showed upon his face were those of an amiable and a serene soul filled with benevolence and charity. He looked like one of those irritatingly optimistic old gentlemen who habitually carry small coins and stray bits of candy in their pockets for such small children as they may converse with under the smiling eyes of nurses.

"Ah, Senor Bell," he said gently. "You do cause me to admire you. May I see your hands again?"

Bell held them out. He seemed to have conquered their writhing to some extent. But he could not hold them quite still. Sweat stood out on his forehead. He thrust them abruptly out of sight again.

"Sad," said The Master gently. "Very sad." He sighed faintly and laid down the rose he had been toying with. His fingers caressed the soft petals delicately. "Fortunately," he said benevolently, "it is not yet too late for me to relieve the strain under which you labor, Senor. May I send for a certain medicine which will dispose of those symptoms in a very short time?"

"We'll talk first," said Bell harshly. "I want to hear what you have to say."

THE Master nodded, his fingers touching the rose petals as if in a sensitive pleasure in their texture.

"Always courageous," he said benignly. "I admire it while I combat it. But the Senor Jamison. . . ."

Jamison had been looking fascinatedly at his own hands, opening and closing the fingers with a savage abruptness. They obeyed him, though they trembled.

"I didn't drink the damned stuff that hotel keeper brought us last night," he growled. "Bell did. And I—"

"Wait a minute, Jamison," said Bell evenly. "Let's talk to The Master for a while. I swore, sir," he said grimly, "that I'd kill you. I've seen what your devilish poison does, in the hands of the men you've chosen to distribute it. I've seen"—he swallowed and said harshly—"I've seen enough to make me desire nothing so much as to see you roast in hell! But you wanted to talk to me. Go ahead!"

THE Master beamed at him, and then glanced about at the frock-coated men who had been attending him. Bell glanced at them. Ribiera was there, chuckling.

"I told you, *tio mio*," he said familiarly, "that he would not be polite. You can do nothing with him. Better have him shot."

Francia, of Paraguay, nodded amusedly to Bell as their eyes met. But The Master shook his really rather beautiful head. An old man can be good to look at, and with a saintly aureole of snow-white hair and the patriarchal white beard, The Master was the picture of benign and beautiful old age.

"Ah, you do not understand," he protested mildly. "The more the Senor Bell shows his courage, *hijo mio*, the more we must persuade him." He turned to Bell. "I realize," he said gently, "that there are hardships connected with the administration of my power, Senor. It is inevitable. But the Latin races of the continent which is now nearly mine require strong handling. They require a strong man to lead them. They are comfortable only under despotism. The task I have chosen for you is different, entirely. *Los Americanos del Norte* will not respond to the treatment which is necessary for those *del Sud*. Their governments, their traditions, are entirely unlike. If you become my deputy and viceroy for all your nation, you shall rule as you will. A benevolent, yet strong, rule is needed for your people. It may even be—I will permit it—that the democratic institutions of your nation may continue if you so desire. I am offering you, Senor, the position of the absolute ruler of your nation. You may interfere with the present government not at all, if you choose, provided only that my own commands are obeyed when relayed through you. I choose you because you have courage, and resource, and because you have the *Yanqui* cleverness which will understand your nation and cope with it."

BELL inhaled deeply.

"In other words," he said bitterly, "you're saying indirectly that you offer me a chance to be the sort of ruler Americans will submit to without too much fuss, because you think one of Ribiera's stamp would drive them to rebellion.

The fine dark eyes twinkled.

"You have much virtue, Senor. My nephew—though he is to be my successor—has a weakness for a pretty face. Would you prefer that I give him the task of subduing your nation?"

"You might try it," said Bell. His eyes gleamed. "He'd be dead within a week."

The Master laughed softly.

"I like you, Senor. I do like you indeed. I have not been so defied since another *Americano del Norte* defied me in this same room. But he had not your resource. He had been enslaved with much less difficulty than yourself. I do not remember what happened to him. . . ."

"He was taken, Master," said a fat man with hard eyes, obsequiously, "he was taken in Bolivia." It was the man whom Bell had seen earlier that morning in a carriage. "You gave him to me. He had insulted me when I ordered him sent to you. I had him killed, but he was very obstinate."

"Ah, yes," said The Master meditatively. "You told me the details." He seemed to recall small facts in benevolent retrospection. "But you, Senor Bell, I have need of you. In fact, I shall insist upon your friendship. And therefore—"

He beamed upon Bell.

"I give you back the Senorita Canalejas."

HE shook his head reproachfully at the utterly grim look in Bell's eyes.

"I shall give you one single portion of the antidote to the medicine which makes your hands behave so badly. You may take it when you please. The Senor Jamison I shall keep and enslave. I do not think he will be as obstinate as you are, but he has excellent qualities. If you prove obdurate, I may yet persuade him to under-

take certain tasks for me. But you and the Senorita Canalejas are free. Your boat has been reprovisioned and provided with fuel. You may go from here where you will."

Ribiera snarled.

"*Tio mio*," he protested angrily, "you promised me—"

"Your will in many things," said The Master gently, "but not in all. Remember that you have much to learn, *hijo mio*. I have taught you to prepare my little medicine, it is true. That is so you can take my place if age infirmity shall carry me away." The Master folded his hands with an air of pious resignation. "But you must learn policy. The Senorita Canalejas belongs to the Senor Bell."

Jamison was staring, now, but Bell's eyes had narrowed to mere slits.

"You see," said The Master gently, to him, "I desire your friendship. You may go where you will. You may take the Senorita Canalejas with you. You will have enough of the antidote to my little medicine to keep you sane for perhaps a week. In one week you may go far, with her. You may do many things. But you cannot find a place of safety for her. I still have a little power, Senor. If you take her with you, your hands will writhe again. Your body will become uncontrollable. Your eyes, staring and horror-struck, will observe your own hands rending her. While your brain is yet sane you will see this body of yours which now desires her so ardently, tearing at and crushing that delicate figure, gouging out her eyes, battering her tender flesh, destroying her.... Have you ever seen what a man who has taken my little medicine does to a human being at his mercy?"

THE figures about The Master were peculiarly tense. The fat man with the hard eyes laughed suddenly. It was a horrible laugh. Francia of Paraguay took out his handkerchief and delicately wiped his lips. He was smiling. Ribiera looked at Bell's face and chuckled. His whole gross figure shook with his amusement.

"And of course," said The Master benignly, "if you prefer to commit suicide, if you prefer to leave her here—well, my nephew knows little expedients to reduce her will to compliance. You recall *Yagué*, among others."

Bell's face was a white mask of horror and fury. He tried to speak, and failed. He raised his hand to his throat—and it tore at the flesh, insanely.

"Let—let me see her," croaked Bell, as if strangling.

Jamison stiffened. Bell seemed to be trying to get his hands into his pockets. They were apparently uncontrollable. He thrust them under his coat as there was a stirring at the door.

AND Paula was brought in, as if she had been waiting. She was entirely colorless, but she smiled at Bell. She came quickly to his side.

"I heard," she said in a clear and even little voice. "We will go together, Charles. If there is a week in which we can be together, it will be so much of happiness. And when you are—The Master's victim, we will let the little boat sink, and sink with it. I do not wish to live without you, Charles, and you do not wish to live as his slave."

Bell gave utterance to a sudden laugh that was like a bark. His hands came out from under his coat. Dangling from each one was a small, pear-shaped globule of metal. A staff projected upward from each one, and he held those staffs in his writhing hands. About each wrist was a tiny loop of cord that went down to a pin at the base of the staffs.

"Close to me, Paula," he said coldly. She clung to his arm. He moved forward, with half-a-dozen revolver muzzles pointed at his breast.

"If one of you damned fools fires," he said harshly, "I'll let go. When I let go—these are Mills grenades, and they go off in three seconds after they leave the hand. Stand still!"

THERE was a terrible, frozen silence. Then a movement from behind Bell. Jamison was rising with a grunt.

"Some day, Bell," he observed coolly, "I'll be on to all of your curves. This is the best one yet. But you're likely to let go at any second, aren't you?"

"Like hell!" raged Bell. "I drank some of your poison," he snarled at The Master. "Yes! I was fool enough to do it! But I took what measures any man will take who finds he's swallowed poison. I got it out of my stomach at once. And if you or one of these deputies tries to move. . . ."

Ribiera had blanched to a pasty gray. The Master was frozen. But Bell saw Ribiera's eyes move in swift calculation. There was a solid wall behind The Master. It seemed as if the greenhouse were a sort of passageway between two larger structures. And there was a door almost immediately behind Ribiera. Ribiera glanced right—left—

He flung himself through that door. He knew the secret of The Master's power. He was The Master's appointed successor. If The Master and all his deputies died, Ribiera. . . .

But Bell snapped into action like a bent spring released. His arm shot forward. A grenade went hurtling through the door through which Ribiera had fled. There was an instantaneous, terrific explosion. The solid wall shook and shivered and, with a vast deliberation, collapsed. The greenhouse was full of crushed plaster dust. Panes of glass shivered. . . .

But Bell was upon The Master. He had struck the little man down and stood over him, his remaining automatic replacing the grenade he had thrown.

"Ribiera's dead," he snapped, "and if I'm shot The Master dies too and you all go mad! Stand back!"

The deputies stood frozen.

"I think," said Jamison composedly, "I take a hand now. I'll pick him up, Bell. . . . Right. I've got him. With a grenade hanging down his back. If he jerks away from me, or I from him, it will blow his spine to bits."

"Hold him so," said Bell coldly.

HE went coolly to where he could look over the heap of the collapsed wall. He saw a bundle of torn clothing that had been a man. It was flung against a cracked and tottering chimney.

"Right," he said evenly. "Ribiera's dead, all right.

He turned to the deputies, whose revolvers were still in their hands.

"The Master's carriage, please," he said politely. "To the door. You may accompany us if you please, but in other carriages. I am working for the release of all the Master's slaves, and you among them if you choose. But you can see very easily that there is no hope of the release of The Master without the meeting of my terms."

The Master spoke, softly and mildly, and without fear.

"It is my order that the Senor Bell is to be obeyed. I shall return. You need have no fear of my death. My carriage."

A man went stiffly, half-paralyzed with terror, to where chattering scared servants were grouped in the awful fear that came upon the slaves of The Master at any threat to his rule.

But Bell and Paula and Jamison went slowly and cautiously — though they held the whip hand—to the entrance door of the house, and out to the entrance gate. A carriage was already before the door when they reached it, and others were drawing up in a line behind it.

"Get in," said Bell briefly. "Down to the waterfront."

He turned to the group of frock coated, stricken men who had followed.

"Some of you men," he said coldly, "had better go on ahead and warn the police and the public generally about the certainty of The Master's death if any attempt is made to rescue him."

Francia, of Paraguay, summoned a

swagger and raised his hand to the second carriage. It drew in to the curb.

"I will attend to it, Senor Bell," he said politely. "Ah, when I think that I once raised my revolver to shoot you, and refrained!"

He drove off swiftly.

BELL'S eyes were glowing. He got into the carriage, and such a procession drove through the streets of Punta Arenas as has rarely moved through the streets of any city in the world. The long line of carriages moved at a funereal pace amid a surging, terrified mob. The Master beamed placidly as he looked out over white, starkly agonized faces. Some of the people groaned audibly. A few cursed The Master in their despair. More cursed Bell, not daring to strike or fire on him. But he would have been torn to bits if he had stepped from the carriage for an instant.

"Bell," said Jamison dryly, "considering that I'm prepared to be blown apart on three seconds notice, it is peculiar that this mob frightens me."

The Master's eyes twinkled benignly. He seemed totally insensible to fear.

"You need not be afraid," he said gently. "They will not touch you unless I order them."

Jamison stared down at the little man whose collar he held firmly, with a Mills grenade dangling down at the base of his neck.

"I wouldn't order them to attack, if I were you," he said coldly. "I haven't Bell's brains, but I have just as much dislike for you as he has."

THEY came to the harbor. Bell spoke again.

"The carriage is to drive out to the end of one of the docks, and no one else is to go out on that dock."

The Master relayed the order in his mild voice, but as the coachman obeyed him he clucked his tongue commiseratingly.

"Senor Bell," he protested gently. "You do not expect to escape! Not after killing me! Why that is absurd!"

Bell said nothing. He alighted from the carriage, his face set grimly, and stared ashore at the long, long row of terrified faces staring out at him. The whole waterfront seemed to be lined with staring faces. Wails came from that mass of enslaved human beings.

"Hold him here, Jamison," he said drearily. "I'm going out to look at that big plane. There's a rowboat tied to the dock, here."

He swung down the side into the dock and rowed off into the harbor, while the horses attached to The Master's carriage pawed impatiently at the wooden flooring of the dock. Bell reached the two planes anchored on the still harbor water. The smaller one had brought them down from Buenos Aires. The larger one had gone after the beached amphibian and brought it and Paula on to the city. Bell, from the shore, was seen to be investigating the larger one. He came rowing back.

His head appeared above the dock edge.

"All right," he said tiredly. "The Master has a rule requiring all his ships ready for instant flight. Very useful. The big plane is fueled and full of oil. We'll go out to it and take off."

JAMISON lifted The Master to his feet and with a surge of muscles swept him down to the flooring of the dock.

"Paula first," said Bell, "and then The Master, and then you, Jamison."

"One moment," said The Master reproachfully. "It would be cruel not to let me reassure my subjects. I will give an order."

Bell and Jamison listened suspiciously. But he spoke gently to the coachman.

"You will tell the deputies," said The Master in Spanish, "that a month's supply of medicine for all my subjects will be found in my laboratory. And you may tell them that I shall return before the end of that time."

The coachman's eyes filled with a passionate relief.

"Now," said The Master placidly, "I am ready for our little jaunt."

Paula descended the ladder and seated herself in the bow of the boat. Bell covered The Master grimly with his automatic as he descended, with surprising agility. Jamison came down last, and resumed his former grip on The Master's collar. Bell rowed out to the big plane.

JAMISON kept close watch while Bell started the four huge motors and throttled them down to warming up speed, and while he hauled up the anchor with which the huge seaplane was anchored.

The dock was covered with a swarm of panic stricken folk. Everywhere, all the inhabitants of the city who were slaves to The Master had come in awful terror to watch. And all the inhabitants of the city were slaves to The Master. Some of them fell to their knees and held out imploring arms to Bell, begging him for mercy and the return of The Master. Some cursed wildly.

But, with his jaws set grimly, Bell gave the motors the gun.

The big plane moved heavily, then more swiftly through the water. It lifted slowly, and rose, and rose, and dwindled to a speck high in the air.

And all through the streets and ways of Punta Arenas, fear stalked almost as a tangible thing. Panic hovered over the housetops, always ready to descend. Terror was in the air that every man breathed, and every human being looked at every other human being with staring, haunted eyes. Punta Arenas was waiting for its murder madness to begin.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE were four motors to pull the big plane through the air, and their roaring was a vast thundering noise which the earth reechoed. But inside the cabin that tumult was reduced to a not intolerable humming sound.

"What'll I do with this devil, Bell?" asked Jamison. "Now that we're aloft, I confess this grenade makes me nervous. I'm holding it so tightly my fingers are getting cramped.

"Tie him up," said Bell, without looking. "He'll talk presently."

Movements. The plane flew on, swaying slightly in the way of big seaplanes everywhere. A williwaw began in the hills ahead and swept out and set the ship to reeling crazily in its erratic currents. The Strait vanished and there were tumbled hills below them. Minutes passed.

"Got him fixed up," said Jamison coolly. "I'll guarantee he won't break loose. Got any plans, Bell?"

"No time," said Bell. "I haven't had time to make any. The first thing is to get where his folk will never find us. Then we'll see what we can do with him."

Paula looked at the now bound figure of The Master. And the little old man beamed at her.

"He—he's smiling!" said Paula, in a voice that was full of a peculiar horrified shock.

BELL shrugged. Punta Arenas was all of twenty-five miles behind, and the earth over which they flew began to take on the shape of an island. Water appeared beyond it, and innumerable small islands. Bell began to rack his brain for the infinitesimal scraps of knowledge he had about this section of the world. It was pitifully scanty. Punta Arenas was the southernmost point of the continental mass. All about it was an archipelago and a maze of waterways, thinly inhabited everywhere and largely without any inhabitants at all. The only solid ground between Cape Horn and the Antarctic ice pack was Diego Ramirez and the South Shetlands. . . .

Nothing to go on. But any sufficiently isolated and desolate spot

would do. Almost anywhere along the southern edge of the continental islands should serve.

The plane roared on monotonously, while Bell began to wrestle with another and more serious problem. In three days—two, now—an American naval vessel would turn up, with scientists and chemists on board. It was to be doubted whether anything like an overt act would be risked by that vessel. If all the governments of South America were under The Master's thumb, then cabled orders from his deputies would race three navies to the spot. And the government of the United States does not like to start war, anywhere. Certainly it would not willingly enter into a conflict with the whole southern continent for the solution of a problem that so far affected that continent alone. The Master's kidnapping had solved nothing, so far.

JAMISON tapped his shoulder.

"No pursuit, so far," he observed coolly. "I've looked." Bell nodded.

"They don't dare. Not yet, anyhow. They're depending on The Master. How is he?"

"Smiling peacefully to himself, damn him!" snarled Jamison. "Do you know what we're up against?"

"Ourselves," said Bell coldly. "But I'm nearly licked. He's got to talk!"

Jamison moved away again. The earth below looked as if it had been torn to shreds in some titanic convulsion of ages past. The sea was everywhere, and so was land. There were little threads of silver interlacing and crossing and wavering erratically in every conceivable direction. And there were specks of islands — rocks only yards in extent—and islands of every imaginable size and shape, with their surfaces in every possible state of upheaval and distortion. A broader mass of land appeared ahead and to the left.

"Tierra del Fuego again," muttered Bell. "If we cross it. . . ."

For fifteen minutes the plane thundered across desolate, rocky hills. Then the maze of islets again. Bell scanned them keenly, and saw a tiny steamer traveling smokily, for no conceivable reason, among the scattered bits of stone. The sea appeared, stretching out toward infinity.

Bell rose, to survey a wider space. He swung to the left, so that he was heading nearly southeast, and went on down toward that desolation of desolations, the stormy cape which faces the eternal ice of the antarctic. He was five thousand feet up, then, and scanning sea and earth and sky. . . .

And suddenly he swung sharply to the right and headed out toward the open sea. He felt a small figure pressing against his shoulder. Presently fingers closed tightly upon his sleeve. He glanced down at Paula and managed to smile.

"There are some rocks out there," he told her quietly. "Islands, I think, and Diego Ramirez, at a guess."

THEY were specks, no more, but they were vastly more distinct from the plane than from Mount Beaufoy. That is on Henderson Island in New Year Sound, and its seventeen-hundred-foot peak was almost below Bell when he sighted the islands. But the islands have been seen full fifty miles from there.

It took the plane nearly forty minutes to cover the space, but long before that the islands had become distinct. Two tiny groups of scattered rocks, the whole group hardly five miles in length and by far the greater number no more than boulders surrounded by sheets of foam from breakers. Two of them merited the name of islands. The nearer was high and bare and precipitous. No trace of vegetation showed upon it. The farther was smaller, and at is northern corner a little cove showed, nearly land-locked.

Bell descended steeply. The big plane plunged wildly in the air eddies about the taller island at five hundred feet, but steadied and went winging on down lower, and lower. . . . The

waves between the two islands were not high, but the seaplane alighted with a mighty, a tremendous splashing, and Bell navigated it grimly though clumsily into the mouth of the cove. There a small beach showed. He went very slowly toward it. Presently he swung abruptly about. A wing tip float grounded close to the shore.

The motors cut off and left a thunderous silence. Bell climbed atop the cabin and let go the anchor.

"We're here," he said shortly. "Bring The Master and we'll go ashore."

THE catwalk painted on the lower wing guided them. Bell jumped to the rocks first, and stumbled, and then rose to lift Paula down and take The Master's small, frail body from Jamison's arms.

"You looked for a gun?" asked Bell.

"He'd nothing to fight with," said Jamison heavily. He had been facing the same problem Bell had worked on desperately, and had found no answer. But he shuddered a little as he looked about the island.

There was nothing in sight but rock. No moss. No lichens. Not even stringy grass or the tufty scrub bushes that seemed able to grow anywhere.

Bell untied The Master, carefully but without solicitude. The little man sat up, and brushed himself off carefully, and arranged himself in a comfortable position.

"I am an old man," said The Master in mild reproach. "You might at least have given me a cushion to sit upon."

Bell sat down and lighted a cigarette with fingers that did not tremble in the least.

"Suppose," he said hardly, "you talk. First, of what your poison is made. Second, of what the antidote is made. Third, how we may be sure you tell the truth."

THE MASTER looked at him with bright, shrewd, and apparently kindly old eyes.

"*Hijo mio,*" he said mildly, "I am an old man. But I am obstinate. I will tell you nothing."

Bell's eyes glowed coldly.

"Does it occur to you," he asked grimly, "that it's too important a matter for us to have any scruples about? That we can — and will — make you talk?"

"You may kill me," said The Master benignly, "but that is all."

"And," said Bell, still more grimly, "we have only to get back in the plane yonder, and go away. . . ."

The Master beamed at him. Presently he began to laugh softly.

"*Hijo mio,*" he said gently, "let us stop this little byplay. You will take me back in my airplane, and you will land me at Punta Arenas. And then you will fly away. I concede you freedom, but that is all. You cannot leave me here."

"Paula," said Bell coldly, "get in the plane again. Jamison—"

Paula rose doubtfully. Jamison stood up. The Master continued to chuckle amiably.

"You see," he said cherubically, "you happen to be a gentleman, Senor Bell. Every man has some weakness. That is yours. And you will not leave me here to die, because you have killed my nephew, who was the only other man who knew how to prepare my little medicine. And you know, Senor, that all my subjects will wish to die. Those who do, in fact," he added mildly, "will be fortunate. The effect of my little medicine does not make for happiness without its antidote."

BELL'S hands clenched.

"You know," said The Master comfortably, "that there are many thousands of people whose hands will writhe, very soon. The city of Punta Arenas will be turned into a snarling place of maniacs within a very little while—if I do not return. Would you like, Senor, to think in after days of that pleasant city filled with men and women tearing each other like beasts?

Of little children, even, crouching, and crushing and rending the tender flesh of other little children? Of lisping little ones gone—"

"Stop!" snarled Bell, in a frenzy. "Damn your soul! You're right! I can't! You win—so far!"

"Always," said The Master benevolently. "I win always. And you forget, Senor. You have seen the worst side of my rule. The revolutions, the rebellions that have made men free, were they pretty things to watch? Always, *amigo*, the worst comes. But when my rule is secure, then you shall see."

HE waved a soft, beautifully formed hand. From every possible aspect the situation was a contradiction of all reason. The bare, black, salt encrusted rocks with no trace of vegetation showing. The gray water rumbling and surging among the uneven rocks at the base of the shore, while gulls screamed hoarsely overhead. The white haired little man with his benevolent face, smiling confidently at the two grim men.

"The time will come," said The Master gently, and in the tone of utter confidence with which one states an inescapable fact, "the time will come when all the earth will know my rule. The taking of my little medicine will be as commonplace a thing as the smoking of tobacco, which I abhor, Senores. You are mistaken about there being an antidote and a poison. It is one medicine only. One little compound. A vegetable substance, Senor Bell, combined with a product of modern chemistry. It is a synthetic drug. Modern chemistry is a magnificent science, and my little medicine is its triumph. Even my deputies have not heard me speak so, Senores."

Bell snarled wordlessly, but if one had noticed his eyes they would have been seen to be curiously cool and alert and waiting. The Master leaned forward, and for once spoke seriously, almost reverently.

"There shall be a forward step, Senores, in the race of men. Do you know the difference between the brain of a man and that of an anthropoid ape? It consists only of a filmy layer of cortex, a film of gray nerve cells which the ape has not. And that little layer creates the difference between ape and man. And I have discovered more. My little medicine acts upon that film. Administered in the tiny quantities I have given to my slaves, it has no perceptible effect. It is merely a compound of a vegetable substance and a synthetic organic base. It is not excreted from the body. Like lead, it remains always in solution in the blood. But in or out of the blood it changes, always, to the substance which causes murder madness. Fresh or changed, my little medicine acts upon the brain."

HE smiled brightly upon them.

"But though in tiny quantities it has but little effect, in larger quantities — when fresh it makes the functioning of the gray cells of the human brain as far superior to the unmedicated gray cells, as those human gray cells are to the white cells of the ape! That is what I have to offer to the human race! Intelligence for every man, which shall be as the genius of the past!"

He laughed softly.

"Think, Senores! Compare the estate of men with the estate of apes! Compare the civilization which will arise upon the earth when men's brains are as far above their present level as the present level is above the anthropoid! The upward steps of the human race under my rule will parallel, will surpass the advance from the brutish caveman to intellectual genius. But I have seen, Senores, the one danger in my offering."

There was silence. Jamison shook his head despairingly. The Master could not see him. He formed the word with his lips.

"Crazy!"

BUT Bell said coldly:
"Go on."

"I must rule," said The Master soberly. "It is essential. If my little secret were known, intelligences would be magnified, but under many flags and with many aims. Scientists, with genius beside which Newton's pales, would seek out deadly weapons for war. The world would destroy itself of its own genius. But under my rule—"

"Men go mad," said Bell coldly.

The Master smiled reproachfully.

"Ah, you are trying to make me angry, so that I will betray something! You are clever, Senor Bell. With my little medicine, in such quantities as I would administer it to you. . . ."

"You describe it," said Bell harshly and dogmatically, "as a brain stimulant. But it drives men mad."

"To be sure," said The Master mildly. "It does. It is not excreted from the body save very, very slowly. But it changes in the blood stream. As—let us say—sugar changes into alcohol in digestion. The end-product of my little medicine is a poison which attacks the brain. But the slightest bit of unchanged medicine is an antidote. It is"—he smiled amiably—"it is as if sugar in the body changed to alcohol, and alcohol was a poison, but sugar—unchanged—was an antidote. That is it exactly. You see that I have taken my little medicine for years, and it has not harmed me."

"Which," said Bell—and somehow his manner made utter silence fall so that each word fell separately into a vast stillness—"which, thank God, is the one thing that wins finally, for me!"

HE stood up and laughed. Quite a genuine laugh.

"Paula," he said comfortably, "get on the plane. In the cabin. Jamison and I are going to strip The Master."

Paula stared. The Master looked at him blankly. Jamison frowned bewilderedly, but stood up grimly to obey.

"But Senor," said The Master in gentle dignity, "merely to humiliate me—"

"Not for that," said Bell. He laughed again. "But all the time I've been hearing about the stuff, I've noticed that nobody thought of it as a drug. It was a poison. People were poisoned. They did not become addicts. But you—you are the only addict to your drug."

He turned to Jamison, his eyes gleaming.

"Jamison," he said softly, "did you ever know of a drug addict who could bear to think of ever being without a supply of his drug—*right on his person?*"

Jamison literally jumped.

"By God! No!"

The Master was quick. He was swarming up the plane wing tip before Jamison reached him, and he kicked frenziedly when Jamison plucked him off. But then it was wholly, entirely, utterly horrible that the little white haired man, whose face and manner had seemed so cherubic and so bland, should shriek in so complete a blind panic as they forced his fingers open and took a fountain pen away from him.

"This is it," said Bell in a deep satisfaction. "This is his point of weakness."

THE Master was ghastly to look at, now. Jamison held him gently enough, considering everything, but The Master looked at that fountain pen as one might look at Paradise.

"I—I swear," he gasped. "I—swear I will give you the formula!"

"You might lie," said Jamison grimly.

"I swear it!" panted The Master in agony. "It—if the formula is known it—can be duplicated! It—the excretion can be hastened! It can all be forced from the body! Simply! So simply! If only you know! I will tell you how it is done! The medicine is the cacodylate of—"

Bell was leaning forward, now, like a runner breasting the tape at the end of a long and exhausting race.

"I'll trade," he said softly. "Half the contents of the pen for the formula. The other half we'll need for analysis. Half the stuff in the pen for the formula for freeing your slaves!"

The Master sobbed.

"A—a pencil!" he gasped. "I swear—"

Jamison gave him a pencil and a notebook. He wrote, his hands shaking. Jamison read inscrutably.

"It doesn't mean anything to me," he said soberly, "but you can read it. It's legible."

Bell smiled faintly. With steady fingers he took his own fountain pen from his pocket. He emptied it of ink, and put a scrupulous half of a milky liquid from The Master's pen into it. He passed it over.

"Your medicine," said Bell quietly, "may taste somewhat of ink, but it will not be poisonous. Now, what do we do with you? I give you your choice. If we take you with us, you will be held very secretly as a prisoner until the truth of the information you have given us can be proven. And if your slaves have all been freed, then I suppose you will be tied. . . ."

THE Master was drawn and haggard. He looked very, very old and beaten.

"I—I would prefer," he said dully, "that you did not tell where I am, and that you go away and leave me here. I—I may have some subjects who will search for me, and—they may discover me here. . . . But I am beaten, Senor. You know that you have won."

Bell swung up on the wing of the plane. He explored about in the cabin. He came back.

"There are emergency supplies," he said coldly. "We will leave them with you, with such things as may be useful to allow you to hope as long as possible. I do not think you will ever be found here."

"I—prefer it, Senor," said The Master dully. "I—I will catch fish. . . ."

Jamison helped put the packages ashore. The Master shivered. Bell stripped off his coat and put it on top of the heap of packages. The Master did not stir. Bell laid a revolver on top of his coat. He went out to the plane and started the motors. The Master watched apathetically as the big seaplane pulled clumsily out of the little cove. The rumble of the engines became a mighty roar. It started forward with a rush, skimmed the water for two hundred yards or so, and suddenly lifted clear to go floating away through the air toward the north.

PAULA was the only one who looked back.

"He's crying," she said uncomfortably.

"It isn't fear," said Bell quietly. "It's grief at the loss of his ambition. It may not seem so to you two, but I believe he meant all that stuff he told me. He was probably really aiming, in his own way, for an improved world for men to live in."

The plane roared on. Presently Bell said shortly:

"That stuff he has won't last indefinitely. I'm glad I left him that revolver."

Jamison stirred suddenly. He dug down in his pocket and fished out a cigar.

"Since I feel that I may live long enough to finish smoking this," he observed dryly, "I think I'll light it. I haven't felt that I had twenty minutes of life ahead of me for a long time, now. A sense of economy made me smoke cigarettes. It wouldn't be so much waste if you left half a cigarette behind you when you were killed."

THE tight little cabin began to reek of the tobacco. Paula pressed close to Bell.

"But—Charles," she asked hopefully, "is—is it really all right, now?"

"I think so," said Bell, frowning.

"Our job's over, anyhow. We go up the Chilean coast and find that navy boat. We turn our stuff over to them. They'll take over the task of seeing that every doctor, everywhere in South America, knows how to get The Master's poison out of the system of anybody who's affected. Some of them won't be reached, but most of them will. I looked at his formula. Standard drugs, all of them. There won't be any trouble getting the news spread. The Master's slaves will nearly go crazy with joy. And," he added grimly, "I'm going to see to it that the Rio police take back what they said about us. I think we'll have enough pull to demand that much!"

He was silent for a moment or so, thinking.

"I do think, Jamison," he said presently, "we did a pretty good job."

Jamison grunted.

"If—if it's really over," said Paula hopefully, "Charles—"

"What?"

"You—will be able to think about me sometimes," asked Paula wistfully, "instead of about The Master always?"

Bell stared down at her.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "I have been a brute, Paula! But I've been loving you—" He stopped, and then said with the elaborate politeness and something of the customary idiotic air of a man making such an announcement. "I say, Jamison, did you know Paula and I were to be married?"

Jamison snorted. Then he said placidly:

"No. Of course not. I never dreamed of such a thing. When did this remarkably original idea occur to you?"

He puffed a huge cloud of smoke from his cigar. It was an unusually vile cigar. Bell scowled at him helplessly for a moment and then said wrathfully:

"Oh, go to hell!"

And he bent over and kissed Paula.

(The End)

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

JETTA OF THE LOWLANDS

Beginning an Exciting Three-Part Novel of the Nares Deep

By Ray Cummings

AN ATTACK FROM SPACE

A Sequel to "Beyond the Heaviside Layer"

By Captain S. P. Meek

MAROONED UNDER THE SEA

A Thrilling Novelet of the Ocean Floor

By Paul Ernst

EARTH, THE MARAUDER

The Conclusion of the Tremendous Novel

By Arthur J. Burks

——AND OTHERS!

The ray shot down—and squadrons of planes frizzled like moths in the air.

The Flying City

By H. Thompson Rich

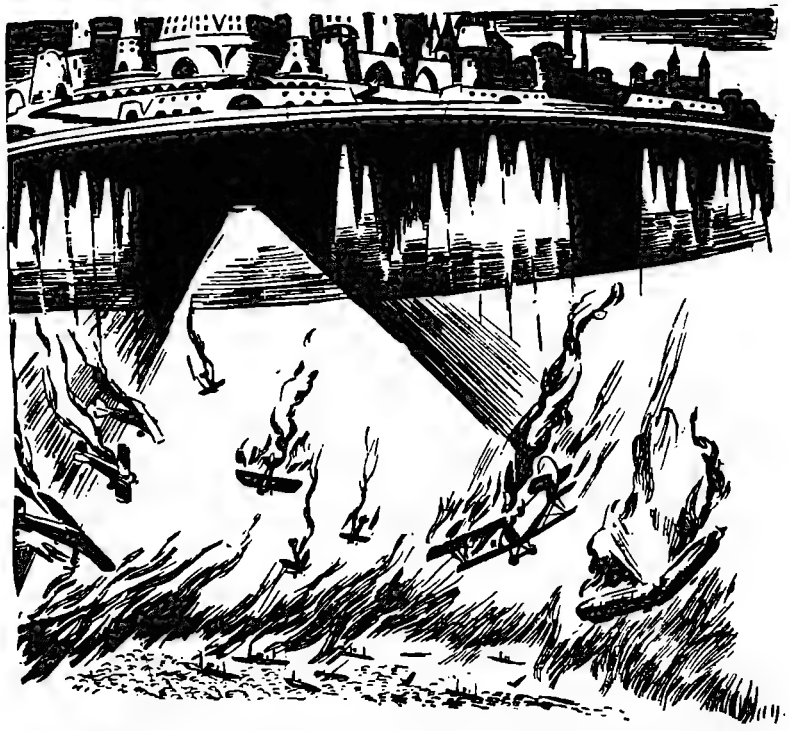
IN the burning solitude of the great Arizona desert, some two miles south of Ajo, a young scientist was about to perform an experiment that might have far-reaching results for humanity.

The scientist was Gordon Kendrick—a tall, tanned, robust chap who looked more like a prospector in search of gold than a professor of physics from the State University of Tucson.

Indeed, he was in a way a prospector, since it was gold he sought—some practical method of tapping the vast radio-energetic treasure of the sun—and it was an apparatus designed to accomplish just this that he was about to test.

> **From Space came Cor's disc-city of Vada —its mighty, age-old engines weakening— its horde of dwarfs hungry for the Earth!**

The primary unit of the mechanism comprised a spheroidal vacuum-tube measuring a little over a foot across its long axis, mounted in a steel bracket that held it horizontal with the ground. Down through its short axis ran a shaft on which was centered a light cross of aluminum wire, carrying four vanes of mica, one



face of each coated with lampblack. A flexible cable led from the bottom of this shaft to the base of the bracket, where it was geared to a small electric motor driven by two dry cells. A rheostat-switch for delivering and controlling the current was mounted nearby.

At the wide arc of the egg-shaped tube was a concave platinum cathode, at the narrow arc a nib of some sort, ending in a socket. From this socket, two heavy insulated wires extended sixty feet or so across the sand to the secondary unit of the mechanism, which was roughly a series of resistance coils, resembling those in an ordinary electric heater.

AS Kendrick prepared to test this delicate apparatus that represented so much of his time and thought, held so much of his hope locked up in it, a turmoil was in his heart, though his brown face was calm.

If his theories were right, that revolving cross would tap and draw into its vanes radio-energetic waves of force, much as the whirling armature of a dynamo draws into its coils electro-magnetic waves of force. For the blackened sides of the vanes, absorbing more radiation than the bright sides, would cause the molecules to rebound from the warmer surfaces with greater velocity, setting up an alternate pressure and bringing the rays to a focus on the cathode, where they would be reflected to the nib as waves of *heatricity*, to use the word he had coined.

Those were Kendrick's theories, and now he moved to put them to the supreme test. Switching on the current, he set the motor going. In response, the cross began to revolve, slowly at first—then faster, faster, as he opened the rheostat wider.

Eyes fixed on his resistance coils, he gave a sudden cry of triumph. Yes, there was no doubt about it! They were growing red, glowing brightly, whitely, above the intense desert sunlight.

Here was a means of converting solar radiation into heat, then, that offered tremendous commercial possibilities!

But even as he exulted, there came a blinding flash—and the overtaxed coils burst into flame.

SHIELDING his eyes from the glare, he reached for the rheostat, shut off the current, rushed to his secondary unit—where he beheld an amazing sight. Not only had this part of the apparatus completely disintegrated, but the sand of the desert floor under it as well. On the spot quivered a miniature lake of molten glass!

As Kendrick stood ruefully beside that fiery pool, meditating on the spectacular but not altogether gratifying results of his experiment, a peculiar low humming sound reached his ears. Rushing back to his primary unit, with the thought that perhaps by some chance he had not fully closed the rheostat, he looked at the cross. But no, the vanes were still.

The humming increased, however—grew into a vibration that made his eardrums ache.

Puzzled, he looked around. What on earth could it be? Had his unruly experiment called into play some tremendous, unsuspected force of the universe Was he to bring the world to ruin, as a result of his blind groping after this new giant of power?

Such predictions had often been made by the ignorant, to be dismissed by scientists as the veriest nonsense. But was there some truth in the universal fear, after all? Was he to be the Prometheus who stole fire from Olympus, the Samson who toppled down the temple?

Chilled, dizzied with the pain of the ever-increasing vibration, he gritted his teeth, awaiting he knew not what.

Then it came—a spectacle so staggering that he went rigid with awe as he regarded it, all power of motion utterly numbed for the moment. The vibration ceased. The thing appeared.

It was a city—a city in the air—a flying city!

AS Kendrick stood staring at this phenomenon, he could scarcely credit his senses.

Had the magic carpet of Bagdad suddenly materialized before him, he would not have been more astounded. And indeed, it was in a way a magic carpet—a great disclike affair, several miles in diameter, its myriad towers and spires glinting like gold under the noonday sun, while its vast shadow fell athwart the desert like the pall of an eclipse.

The lower portion, he noted, was in the main flat, though a number of wartish protuberances jutted down from it, ejecting a pale violet emanation. Whatever this was it seemed to have the effect of holding the thing motionless in the air, for it hovered there quite easily, a hundred yards or so above the ground.

But what was it? Where was it from? What had brought it?

Those were the questions he wanted answered; and they were to be, sooner than he knew.

As he stood there speculating, a device like a trap-door opened in the base of the disc, and creatures resembling human beings began descending. Began floating down, rather.

Whereupon Kendrick did what any sensible man would have done, under similar circumstances. He reacted into motion. In short, he ran.

GLANCING back over his shoulder after a minute or two, however, he drew up sheepishly. Of that strange apparition and those who had descended from it there was not a trace, not a shadow!

But the peculiar humming had recommenced, he realized in the next

breath—and at the same instant he felt himself seized by invisible hands.

There was a struggle, but it was brief and futile. When it was over his captors became visible once more. They were singular little beings about four feet tall, with strange, wise, leathery faces, their heads grotesquely bald.

The humming had ceased again. The disc, too, was once more visible.

What happened next was something even more astounding, if there could be any further degrees of wonder possible for the utterly baffled young scientist. He felt himself lifted up, leaving the desert floor, whirling away toward that incredible phenomenon hovering there.

Another moment or two and he had been borne up through its trap-door opening, was standing in a dark space bounded by solid metal walls. Then he was thrust into a cylinder with several of his tiny guards, shot swiftly upward.

A DOOR opened as they came to rest, and he was led out into a vast court of gleaming amber crystal. Something like a taxi slid up, with iridescent planes, and he was bundled into it, whirled away again.

Down broad, gleaming avenues they passed, where similar traffic flowed densely, but under marvelous control. Towering skyscrapers loomed to right and left. Tier on tier of upper and lower boulevards revealed themselves, all crowded with automotive and pedestrian activity.

At length a stupendous concourse was reached. Thousands of these taxis and similar vehicles were parked along its broad flanks, while literal swarms of diminutive individuals circulated to and fro.

Assisted from the vehicle that had brought him to this obvious center of the disc's activities, Kendrick was led into a monumental structure of jade-green stone that towered a full hundred stories above the street level. There he was escorted into another of those projectilelike elevators, shot up, up—till at length it came to rest. The door opened and he was led out into a small lobby of the same amber crystal he had observed before.

By now his guards had diminished to two, but he no longer made any effort to escape. Wherever this amazing adventure might lead, he was resolved to follow it through.

One of the guards had advanced to a jewelled door and was pressing a button. In response, the door opened. A golden-robed, regal creature stood there.

THOUGH dwarfed to four feet, like his fellow, he was obviously their mental superior to a prodigious degree. Not only was his symmetrical bald head of large brain content, but the finely-cut features of his parchment face bore the unmistakable stamp of a powerful intellect.

"*Ao-chaa!*" commanded this evident monarch of the disc, addressing the guards.

They bowed and departed, abruptly.

"My dear Kendrick!" the regal personage now said, in thin, precise English. "It is indeed a pleasure to welcome you to my humble quarters. Pray enter and make yourself comfortable."

Whereupon he ushered him into a dazzling apartment that was one vast mosaic of precious gems, indicated a richly carved chair, into which the young scientist dropped wonderingly.

"Now then, Professor," continued the mighty little dwarf, when he was seated in a chair even more sumptuous, "suppose we have a friendly little discussion. I have been much interested in your experiments on heat radiation. What you demonstrated this morning, in particular, was most absorbing. You have hit upon a rather profound scientific principle, yes?"

"Possibly," Kendrick admitted, quite conscious that he was being patronized.

"Oh, don't be modest, my dear fellow!" smiled the dwarf. "I am the last

one to belittle your achievement. Indeed, it is because of it that I have invited you here to-day. Permit me to introduce myself, and to make clear one or two possibly perplexing matters. Then I am sure we shall have a most agreeable chat."

HIS name was Cor, he said, and he was in truth the monarch of this strange realm. His people had come from the one-time planet of Vada, far distant in the universe. A thousand years ago, this planet had been doomed by the approach of an alien star. Their great scientist, Ravv, had met the emergency by inventing the disc, into whose construction they had poured all their resources. The pick of their populace had been salvaged on this giant life-raft. The rest had perished when that destroying star had crashed down on the doomed Vada.

Since then these survivors and their descendants had been voyaging through space on their marvelous disc. For hundreds of years they had given no thought to the future, content to drift on and on in the interstellar void, breathing an atmosphere produced artificially. But at length the inevitable had happened. This superb piece of mechanism devised by their supergenius, Ravv, was beginning to show signs of wear. Some of its mighty engines were nearing the exhaustion point. Either they must soon find a planet comparable with the one they had once known, where they could pause and rehabilitate their machinery, or they must disintegrate and pass into oblivion.

Faced with that crisis, Cor had long been seeking such a planet. He had found it, at last, in the earth—and had resolved that this was where they were going to alight and transplant the civilization of ancient Vada, pending such time as they could take to space again.

FOR some months now they had been hovering over various portions of the earth, studying its geography and its peoples, with the result that they had concluded the United States offered the most logical point for launching the attack. Once this country was subdued, they were in possession of the richest and most advanced section of the planet. The conquest of the rest of it could await their leisure.

With such an invasion in view, their scientists had mastered the language of the country. This had been accomplished very easily, since in addition to their power of mingling with the populace in an invisible form, they had the principles of radio developed to a high degree and were able to tune in on any station they wanted.

Kendrick sat there, stunned, as Cor followed his astounding revelation of their origin with this calm plan for the conquest of America, of the world. Why, of all people on earth, had he alone been singled out for this disclosure?

He asked the question now.

"My dear Professor, can't you really guess?" replied Cor, with that leathery smile. "Hasn't it dawned that you were a little too near our own field with that machine of yours? A trifle more research, a slightly different application—and you would have become a dangerous enemy."

"You—you mean—?"

"I mean there isn't a great deal of difference between the experiments you have been making and those our great Ravv once made. For instance, had your broadcast your heatricity, as you call it, instead of trying to transmit it on wires—well, picture a receiving apparatus in each home of the land, like your commercial radio sets. You would have become a billionaire, don't you see?"

KENDRICK saw indeed. It was simple, so simple! Fool—why hadn't he thought of it?

"But your invention will never make you wealthy now, my dear fellow," Cor went on, tauntingly. "You will be our

guest, here, until we have taken over your interesting country. After that, if there is any need for the broadcasting of heat, we will furnish it ourselves. We have those facilities, among others, fully developed. Would you care to see our plant?"

Kendrick naturally admitted that he would, so the dwarf led him through a rear door and up a winding flight of stairs. They emerged presently into a great laboratory housed in the glass-roofed pinnacle of the tower.

There he beheld a sight that left him breathless. Never before had he seen such an assemblage of scientific apparatus. Its vastness and strangeness were fairly overpowering, even to a man as well versed in physio-chemical paraphernalia as he was.

Before his eyes could take in a tenth part of the spectacle, Cor had led him to the left wall.

"There," he said, "you will observe a development of your heat generator."

Kendrick looked—to see a long bank of large vacuum-tubes, each about three feet high and a foot wide, connected by a central shaft that caused series of little vanes in each of them to revolve at lightning speed.

Around the apparatus moved numerous small attendants, oiling, wiping, adjusting its many delicate parts.

"Well, what do you think now?" asked Cor.

Kendrick made no reply, though he was thinking plenty.

"You see, it is your invention, my dear Professor," the dwarf went on in his taunting voice, "only anteceded by a thousand years—and rather more perfected, you must admit."

HE walked now to the center of the laboratory, where stood a huge dial of white crystal, ranked with many levers and switches, all capped with the same material.

"Behold!" he said, throwing over one.

Instantly there came again that peculiar low humming that had so puzzled him a few minutes before—and the entire room, its engines, its attendants, Cor himself, leapt into invisibility. Only Kendrick remained, facing the faintly visible crystal dial.

Then he saw a switch move, as though automatically. But no, for the dwarf's hand was on it now. Visibility had returned. The vibration ceased.

"That is the central control," said Cor. "Our city and all its inhabitants become invisible when that switch is thrown. Only the dial remains, for the guidance of the operator, and even that cannot be seen at a distance of more than fifty feet. But now behold!"

He raised his hand, touched a watch-like device strapped to his wrist—and was instantly invisible. But the laboratory and every machine and person in it remained in plain view. Nor was there any vibration now.

THE next moment, having touched that curious little device again, Cor reappeared.

"That is the local control," he said. "Every one of our inhabitants, except those under discipline, has one of these little mechanisms. It enables us to make ourselves invisible at will. A convenience at times, you must admit."

"Decidedly," Kendrick agreed. "And the principle?"

"Quite simple. One of those, in fact, that lies behind your researches. Doubtless you would have hit upon it yourself in time. Your own scientist, Faraday, you may recall, held the opinion that the various forms under which the forces of matter manifest themselves have a common origin. We of the disc, thanks to our great Ravv, have found that common origin."

It was the origin of matter itself, Cor said, which lay in the ether of interstellar space—energy, raw, cosmic—vibrations, rays.

By harnessing and controlling these various rays, his people had been able to accomplish their seeming miracles—miracles that the people of earth, too, were beginning to achieve—as in elec-

tricity, for instance, and its further application, radio.

But the people of Vada had long since mastered such simple rays, and now, in possession of vastly more powerful ones, had the elemental forces of the universe at their disposal.

THE disc was propelled through space by short rays of tremendously high frequency, up above the ultra-violet. The same rays, directed downward instead of outward, enabled them to overcome the pull of gravity when a planet's influence, as at present. And the escalator rays, by which they could proceed to and from the disc, were also of high frequency, as were their invisibility rays.

"But you, Professor, are more interested in low frequency rays, the long ones down below infra-red," continued Cor. "You have seen our development of the heat-dynamo principle. It utilizes, I might add, not only solar radiation but that of the stars as well. There being a billion and a half of these in the universe, many of them a thousand times or more as large as your own sun, we naturally have quite an efficient little heating plant here. It provides us with our weapon of warfare, as well as keeping us warm. Permit me to demonstrate."

He led the way to a gleaming circle of glass like an inverted telescope, about a yard in diameter, mounted in the floor.

"Look!" said the dwarf.

Kendrick did so—and there, spread below him, lay the floor of the desert. His camp, his apparatus, were just as he had left them.

Cor now moved toward the dial.

"Behold!" he said, pulling a lever.

Instantly the scene below was an inferno. Stricken by a blast of stupendous heat, the whole area went molten, lay quivering like a lake of lava in the crater of an active volcano.

"Suppose, my dear Professor," smiled the dwarf, strolling back from the dial, "just suppose, for instance, that instead of the lonely camp of an obscure scientist, your proud city of New York had been below there!"

KENDRICK shuddered.

Well he knew now the terrible power, the appalling menace of this strange invader.

"I would prefer not to make such a supposition," he said, quietly, with a last thoughtful glance at that witches' caldron below.

"Then let us think of pleasanter things. You are my guest of honor, sir—America's foremost scientist, though she may never realize it," with a piping chuckle. "To-night there will be a great banquet in your honor. Meanwhile, suppose I show you to your quarters."

Nettled, fuming, though outwardly calm, Kendrick permitted himself to be escorted from the laboratory to an ornate apartment on one of the lower floors.

There Cor left him, with the polite hint that he would find plenty of attendants handy should he require anything.

Alone now, in the midst of this vast, nightmarish metropolis, he paced back and forth, back and forth—knowing the hideous fate that threatened the world but powerless to issue one word of warning, much less avert it.

KENDRICK was still thinking and brooding along these lines when saw the door of the apartment swiftly open and close again.

Someone had entered, invisible!

Backing away, he waited, tense. Then, suddenly, his visitor materialized. With a gasp, he saw standing before him a beautiful girl.

She was a young woman, rather, in her early twenties. Not one of these pigmies of the disc, either, but a tall, slender creature of his own world.

Her hair was dark, modishly bobbed. Her eyes were a deep, clear brown, her skin a warm olive. And she was dressed as though she had just stepped off

Fifth Avenue—which indeed she had, not so long ago, as he was soon to learn.

"I hope I haven't startled you too much, Mr. Kendrick," she said, in a rich, husky murmur, "but—well, there wasn't any other way."

"Oh, I guess I'll get over it," he replied with a smile. "But you have the advantage of me, since you know my name."

Hers was Marjorie Blake, she told him then.

"Not the daughter of Henderson Blake?" he gasped.

"Yes," with a tremor, "his only daughter."

Whereupon Kendrick knew the solution of a mystery that had baffled the police for weeks. The newspapers had been full of it at the time. This beautiful girl, whose father was one of America's richest men and president of its largest bank, had disappeared as though the earth had swallowed her. She had left their summer estate at Great Neck, Long Island, on a bright June morning, bound for New York on a shopping tour—and had simply vanished.

SUICIDE had been hinted by some of the papers, but had not been taken seriously, since she had no apparent motive for ending her life. Abduction seemed to be the more logical explanation, and huge rewards had been offered by her frantic parents—all to no avail.

What had happened was, she now explained, that after visiting several shops and making a number of purchases, she had stepped into Central Park at the Plaza for a breath of fresh air before lunching at the Sherry-Netherlands, where she planned to meet some friends.

But before advancing a hundred yards along the secluded path, she had been seized by invisible hands—had felt something strapped to her wrist, before anyone came in sight—and then, invisible too, had been lifted up, whirled away into a vast, humming vibration that sounded through the air.

Once on the disc, it had swept off into space at incredible speed, pausing only when some hundreds of miles above the earth and invisible from below without mechanical aid. When its vibration finally ceased that amazing city had leapt before her eyes.

Then, her own visibility restored, she had been led into the presence of that mighty little monarch, Cor, who explained that she had been seized as a hostage and would be held as an ace in the hole, pending conquest of her country. Since when she had been a prisoner aboard the disc.

LEARNING of Kendrick's capture, from gossip among the women, she had taken the first opportunity of coming to him, in the hope that between them they might devise some means of escape.

Indeed, that was his own fondest hope—their imperative need, if the people of America and of the earth were to be saved from this appalling menace. But what basis was there for such a fantastic hope? Just one, that he could see.

"That thing on your wrist," he said, voicing it. "I'm surprised they let you wear one of those."

"They don't," she smiled. "I stole it—from one of the maids in my apartment. It was the only way I could get here without being seen. I felt I must see you at once. We've got to do something, soon, or it'll be too late. I felt that, as a scientist, you might have some idea how we could get off."

"How do the people themselves get off?" he asked. "That escalator ray—do you know how they use it?"

"No, I've never been able to find out. They don't let me go near that part of the city."

Kendrick reflected a moment.

"Let's have a look at that invisibility affair," he said.

She removed it from her wrist, handed it to him. Somewhat in awe, he examined it.

THE mechanism portion, which was linked in a strap of elastic metal, resembled only superficially a watch, he now saw. Rather it had the appearance of some delicate electric switch. Rectangular in shape, it was divided into two halves by a band of white crystal. In each of these halves were two little buttons of the same material, those on one side round, on the other square.

"Which buttons control the invisibility?" he asked.

"The square ones," she replied. "One's pushed in now, you see. If you should push the other, the first would come out—and you'd pass out of the picture, so to speak."

Kendrick was half tempted to try the thing then and there, but deferred the impulse.

"What are the round buttons for?" he inquired instead.

Marjorie didn't know, but thought they were probably an emergency pair, in case something went wrong with the square ones. In any event, nothing happened when you pushed them.

Kendrick pushed one, just to see. It was true. Nothing happened—but he seemed to sense a faint, peculiar vibration and a wave of giddiness swept over him. On pushing the other, which released the first, it stopped.

HE handed the device back to Marjorie.

"There's your bracelet. Now, if I can just get one like it, I think we'll get down to earth all right."

"Oh, Mr. Kendrick!" Her eyes lit up eagerly. "Then you've thought of a way?"

"Not exactly. I think I've discovered their own way. I can't be certain, but I'm willing to gamble on it, if you are."

"Then you—you think those round buttons are connected with the escalator rays?"

"Exactly! I think they control individual descent and ascent, just as the square ones control individual visibility and invisibility. At any rate, it's the hunch I'm going to act on right now, if you're with me."

"Oh, I'm with you!" she breathed. "Anything, death almost, would be preferable to this."

"Then stand by, invisible. I'm going to get one of my jailors in here and relieve him of his wrist-watch."

Marjorie touched that little square button on her own. She instantly became invisible.

Kendrick touched a button too, a button he had noticed beside the door. As he had supposed, it brought one of the Vadans.

Shutting the door quietly, he seized the fellow before he could move his hand to his wrist. Thwarted in his attempt to vanish from sight, the diminutive guard attempted an outcry. But Kendrick promptly throttled him.

MARJORIE had reappeared by now and together they bound him to a chair with a gilded cord torn from the drapery.

Removing the precious mechanism from his wrist, Kendrick slipped it on his own.

"Now let's go!" he said, pressing the protruding square button of the device. "We haven't a minute to—my golly, what a peculiar sensation!"

"It is rather odd, isn't it?" she laughed, pressing her own and joining him in that invisible realm.

"Feels like a combination electric massage and cold shower! Where are you, anyway? I can't see you."

"Of course you can't!" came an unseen tinkle. "Here!"

He felt her brush him.

"Better hold hands," he suggested, then gave an invisible flush he was glad she couldn't see.

"All right. A good idea."

Her delicate hand came into his, soft, warm. Heart vibrating even faster than his body, his whole being a-quiver with a strange exaltation, Kendrick opened the door, and they left the apartment.

THE next half-hour was the tensest either of them had ever experienced. Every foot of the way was fraught with peril.

Not only did they have to carefully avoid the visible swarms of little people who hurried everywhere, but had to be on their guard as well against any who might be moving about like themselves under cover of invisibility.

Nor could they use any elevators or public conveyances, but were obliged to make their way down to the concourse by heaven knew how many flights of stairs, and cross heaven knew how many teeming streets on foot, before they reached the amber court, below which the trap-door and their hope of freedom.

They got there at last, however, descended, and peered down from that yawning brink upon the desert floor—to draw back with gasps of dismay. For the area still gleamed semi-molten from the stupendous blast that had wiped out Kendrick's camp.

"W-what is it?" she gasped.

Swiftly he told her.

"But isn't there any way around it? Look, over there to the left. One edge of the crater seems to end almost underneath us."

It was true that the center of the caldron was far to the right of where they stood, and that its left rim was only a little within their direct line of descent. But to land even one foot inside that inferno would be as fatal as to alight in its very midst.

KENDRICK was thinking fast.

"There's just a chance," he said. "It all depends upon how wide the zone of these escalator rays is, and whether we can tune in on them. At least, I can probably answer the latter question."

Pushing the protrudent round button on his mysterious bracelet as he spoke, he leaned over the edge of the trap-door and awaited results.

They were not long in coming. The vibration he was already under from the invisibility rays seemed to double. Alternate waves of giddiness and depression, of push and pull, swept over him.

A minute of it was enough. He pressed the round button that now protruded, ending this influence, and faced Marjorie, stating:

"I'm positive now that these things control descent and ascent. As nearly as I can figure, the rays work on the principle of an endless belt. If you're up here, you get carried down, and vice versa. As to how wide the belt is, and whether you can move sideways on it, remains to be seen. Anyway, I'm going to take a chance. I'll go first. If my guess is wrong, you—well, needn't follow."

"No, I'm going with you!" she declared resolutely. "We've come this far together. I shan't be left alone now. Let's go!"

And again her soft, warm hand was in his.

Lord, what a girl! How many would be brave enough to take a gamble like that, on a fellow's mere supposition?

"All right—go it is!" he said. "Push your round button, like this." He showed her the way he thought was right, pushed his own. "Ready?"

"Ready!"

THEIR voices were grave. It was a grim prospect, stepping off into space like that, with only a guess between them and death.

"Then jump!"

They jumped, gripping each other's hands tightly—and instead of dropping like plummets were caught in a powerful field of force and whirled gently downward.

"Oh, you were right!" gasped Marjorie, awed. "See, we—"

Then she paused, horror-stricken, for it was obvious that they were to descend within that lake of molten glass, unless they could change their course at once.

"Quick!" he called. "Hold fast! Now—run!"

Breathless, they raced to the left, across that invisible descending belt.

Too far, Kendrick knew, and they would plunge outside its zone, fall crushed and mangled. Not far enough, and they would meet cremation. It was a fearful hazard, either way, but it had to be taken.

They were almost down, now, and still not quite far enough to the left. The heat of that yawning crater rose toward them.

"Faster—*faster!*" he cried, fairly dragging her along with him.

A last dash—a breathless instant—and they stood there on the ground, not three feet from the edge of doom.

Swooning with the heat, Marjorie swayed against him, murmured an incoherent prayer.

"Take heart!" he whispered, lifting her bodily and bearing her some yards away. "We're down—safe!"

THEIR safety was but relative, however, Kendrick well knew. Until they could put miles between them and this monstrous disc, they were not really safe. No telling how soon their escape might be discovered. No telling what terrible means Cor might take of curbing their flight.

So as soon as Marjorie had recovered sufficiently to proceed, they headed off across the desert at a fast walk toward Ajo, where he hoped to catch the afternoon train for Gila Bend. From there, they could board the limited for Tucson and points east, when it came through from Yuma that night.

They had tuned out on the escalator rays, but continued on still invisible—for the disc hung above them in plain view and it would have been suicide to let themselves be seen.

Even so, Kendrick soon began to have an uneasy feeling of being followed. He looked around from time to time, but could see nothing. Were some of those invisible little creatures on their trail?

He said nothing to Marjorie of his anxiety, but presently she too began glancing backward uneasily, every few steps.

"They are near us!" she said at length, in a whisper. "I can sense them."

It was more than sense, they soon discovered. Little paddings became quite audible, and once or twice they saw the sand scuffed up, not twenty feet away, as though by a foot passing over it.

MEANWHILE they were climbing a rise of ground, broken by many small hummocks and dotted with thorny shrubs. On the other side, at the foot of a long down-slope, lay Ajo.

Once they reached the summit, Kendrick felt sure they could outdistance their pursuers on the descent. Already, if his watch was right, the train was preparing to pull out. It would be a breathless dash, but he was confident they could make it.

So he reassured Marjorie as best he could, and helped her on up the slope.

They were practically on the summit and already in view of the little railroad station and huddle of shacks below—when suddenly he felt himself tripped and flung violently to the ground. At the same instant, his companion emitted a scream, as she felt herself seized by invisible hands.

Leaping to his feet, Kendrick flailed out with solid fists at their attackers. Groans answered the impacts and he knew his blows were taking effect.

FREE for a moment he dashed to Marjorie, felt for the midgets who swarmed around her. Seizing one of the invisible forms, he lifted it and flung it crashing to the ground. Another, likewise, and another.

Then he threshed his legs, where two of the creatures clung, trying to drag him down again. They flew through the air, with cries of fright.

"Well, so far, so good!" he exclaimed. "We won't wait to see if there are any more. Come on—let's go!"

"Right!"

Reaching for each other's hands, they raced down the slope.

Halfway there they saw a warning blast of steam rise from the engine, followed by a whistle.

"They'll be pulling out in a minute now!" he gasped, increasing speed. "We've got to make it!—our only chance!"

"We *will* make it!" she sobbed through clenched teeth, meeting his pace.

Glancing over his shoulder, after another fifteen seconds, Kendrick saw that the disc was no longer visible. Since there was no vibration he realized with relief that it was now hidden behind the slope they were descending.

"Quick—push your button!" he said, pushing his own.

They came out of the influence of the invisibility rays, raced breathless on down the slope—gained the station platform just as the train was getting under way.

Helping the exhausted girl aboard, he mounted the steps himself, led her through the vestibule into its single passenger coach.

Dropping into a seat, they sat there panting as the train gathered speed.

BY the time the decrepit but life-saving little local drew into Gila Bend they had somewhat recovered from their harrowing experience.

Marjorie was still pale, however, as Kendrick helped her from the train.

"I may recover," she said with a wan smile, "but I'll never look the same! An old saying, but I know what it means now."

He thought better of a sudden impulse to tell her she looked quite all right to him. Instead, he said grimly:

"I know now what a lot of things mean!"

The Tucson limited would not be through for over an hour, they learned. That would give them time to hunt up the authorities and sound a warning of the ominous invader that was in the vicinity. Perhaps, by prompt military action, it might be destroyed, or at least crippled.

But first they went to the telegraph office, where Marjorie got off a message that would bring joy to her grieved family.

While standing there outside the barred window, odors of food came wafting to them from a nearby lunch-room.

"Um-m!" she sniffed. "That smells good to me! I haven't tasted any earthly cooking for ages. Everything on that horrible disc was synthetic."

"Then I suggest we have ham and eggs, at once," he said. "Or would you prefer a steak?"

"I think I'll have both!"

AS they walked into the lunch-room, Kendrick told her of the banquet in his honor Cor had promised for that night.

"I guess I didn't miss much," he ended.

"You certainly didn't!" she assured him, with a smile. "It would have opened with a purée of split-molecule soup, continued with an entrée of breaded electrons, and closed with an ionic café."

He laughed.

"I'm just as well satisfied I was unable to attend! Humble as it is, I think this will prove to be much more wholesome food."

Night had fallen by the time they left the lunch-room. Glancing at his watch, Kendrick saw that they still had better than a half-hour before the limited was due, so they betook themselves to the police station.

It was only a block away and in consequence they weren't long reaching it.

The chief had gone home, the officer at the desk informed them, but if there was anything they cared to report, he would be glad to make note of it.

A big raw-boned westerner, he shifted his quid as he spoke and spat resoundingly in a cuspidor at his feet.

"All right, then—get your pencil

ready!" said Kendrick with a smile. "This is Miss Marjorie Blake, daughter of Henderson Blake, of New York. Perhaps you read of her disappearance, a few weeks ago. And I . . ."

As he introduced himself and told briefly of their astounding experience, the officer's eyes bulged with amazement.

"Say, what yuh-all tryin' to hand me?" he snorted finally. "D'yuh think I was born simple?"

"Press your button!" whispered Marjorie. "Show him how the invisibility ray works. It'll save a lot of argument."

"Right!"

HE held up his wrist.

"See this? Now watch!"

Whereupon he pressed the button. But to their dismay, nothing happened.

"Wa-al, I'm still watchin'!" drawled the officer. "Who's loony now?"

Kendrick examined the mechanism in impatience, pressed that little button repeatedly; but still nothing happened.

"Try yours!" he told Marjorie finally.

She did so, with similar results—or lack of them, rather.

"Something's wrong," he said at length. "The ray isn't working."

"Wrong is right!" declared the officer with a contemptuous flood of tobacco juice. "Yuh folks better go catch yuhr train 'fore yuh ferget where it is."

Chagrined, embarrassed, they took their leave, headed back toward the railroad station.

"Of all the utterly silly things!" declared Marjorie, as they walked along. "Why do you suppose it didn't work?"

Kendrick didn't reply at once. When he did, his voice was grave.

"Because the disc has gone!" he said. "We are outside its zone of influence. That's my hunch, at least, and I think we'd better act on it."

"You mean . . . ?"

"I mean our escape has probably caused them to hurry their plans. They're probably over New York right now. I think we'd better get there the quickest possible way."

THE result was that when the train came, they remained on it only to Tucson. There they chartered a fast plane and started east at once.

At sunset the following day the plane swooped out of the sky and slid to rest on the broad grounds of the Blake estate at Great Neck.

As Kendrick stepped from the cabin and helped Marjorie down, a tall, distinguished-looking man with graying hair and close-cropped mustache came hurrying toward them.

"Daddy!" she cried, rushing into his arms. "Oh, Daddy—Daddy!"

Even without this demonstration, Kendrick would have recognized Henderson Blake from pictures he had seen recently in the papers.

Now he was introduced, and Blake was gripping his hand warmly.

"I don't quite know what this is all about, Professor," he heard the great financier say. "Marjorie's telegram last night was as cryptic as it was overjoying. But I do know that I owe you a deep debt of gratitude.'"

"Yes, and you owe our pilot about a thousand dollars, too!" put in the daughter of the house, clinging to her father's arm. "Please give him a check—then we'll go inside and I'll explain all about it."

"A matter very much easier dispatched than my debt to Professor Kendrick," said Blake, complying.

The check was for two thousand, not one, the pilot saw when he received it.

"Thank you very much, sir!" he said, saluting.

"Don't mention it. Good night—and good luck to you!"

THE pilot returned to his plane, it lifted from the lawn, droned off into the twilight.

Then they approached the cool white villa that stood invitingly a hundred

yards or so away beyond sunken gardens.

As they neared it, a handsome, well-preserved woman whose face reflected Marjorie's own beauty came toward them. Lines of suffering were still evident around her sensitive mouth, but her dark eyes were radiant.

"Mother!"

"My poor darling!"

They rushed into each other's arms, clung, sobbing and laughing.

Kendrick was glad when these intimate greetings were over and he had met Mrs. Blake.

They were in the drawing-room now, listening to a somewhat more lucid account of their daughter's experiences and those of her rescuer. Marjorie was doing most of the talking, but every now and again she would turn to Kendrick for verification.

"Heavens!" gasped Mrs. Blake, finally. "Can such things be possible?"

"Almost anything seems possible nowadays, my dear," her husband told her. "And you say, Professor, that you have brought back samples of this invisibility device?"

"Yes, we have, but I can't promise they'll work. I'll try, however."

Whereupon, sceptically, he pressed that little square button—and instantly faded out of sight.

"Good Lord!" cried Blake, leaping to his feet. "That proves it! Why, this is positively—"

HIS remarks were cut short by a scream of terror from his wife.

"Marjorie—Marjorie!" she shrieked.

Wheeling, he faced the chair where his daughter had sat. It was empty, so far as human eyes could see.

"Don't worry, Mother — Daddy!" came a calm voice from it. "I'm quite all right—coming back—steady."

And back she came, as did Kendrick, from the empty chair beside her.

His face was grave. The success of the demonstration, which had proved their story to practical-minded Henderson Blake, had proved to him something altogether more significant. The disc, as he had surmised, had rushed eastward immediately on learning of their escape, and was now probably hovering right over New York.

"Marvelous — marvelous!" declared Blake. "But that heat ray, Professor. That sounds bad. You are convinced it is as powerful as they make out!"

"Positively! That blast they let go in the desert would have utterly destroyed New York."

"Hm! Yes, no doubt you're right. I fully realize now the fearful menace of this thing. Do you think the military authorities will be able to cope with it?"

"I don't know. Perhaps, if they are prompt enough."

"And is there no other way—no scientific way?"

KENDRICK grew thoughtful.

"I wonder," he said at last. "There's just a possibility—something running through my mind—an experiment I'd like to make, if I had the facilities of some large electrical laboratory."

"You shall have them to-morrow!" Blake promised. "I'm one of the directors of Consolidated Electric. Their experimental laboratory in Brooklyn is the finest of its kind in America. I'll see that you have the run of it."

"That will be very kind," said Kendrick. "But don't expect anything to come from it, necessarily. It's just a theory I want to work out."

A butler entered at this moment and announced dinner.

"Well, theories are mighty these days!" beamed Blake, as they rose, clapping the younger man on the shoulder. "You go ahead with your theories—and I'll bring a few facts to bear. To-morrow noon I'll escore some military men and others of my friends over to the laboratory to hear and see something of this menace direct. Meanwhile, and during this crisis, it will honor me to have you as my guest."

"Our guest!" amended Marjorie, with a warm smile.

NEXT morning Blake motored Kendrick out to the Brooklyn laboratory of the Consolidated Electric Utilities Corporation and installed him there.

Then he left—to return at noon with the promised delegation of generals, admirals, statesmen and financiers.

They were all frankly sceptical, though realizing that Henderson Blake was not a man given to exaggeration. Nor did their scepticism altogether vanish when Kendrick had ended his bizarre story with a demonstration of the invisibility device.

Murmurs of amazement ran around the laboratory, it is true, but the more hard-headed of his spectators charged him with having invented the apparatus himself. Though they didn't come right out and say so, they seemed to imply that he was seeking publicity.

Annoyedly, Kendrick tried to refute their charges. But even as he was summoning words, refutation utter and complete came from the air.

A low, humming vibration sounded, grew in volume till it filled the room—and as suddenly ceased. The light of mid-day faded to twilight.

"The disc!" gasped Kendrick, rushing to the west windows.

They followed, tense with awe. And there, between earth and sun, its myriad towers and spires refracting a weird radiance, hovered that vast flying city.

"My God!" muttered a famous general, staring as though he had seen a ghost.

A great statesman opened his lips, but no words came.

"Appalling! Incredible!" burst from others of that stunned assemblage.

THEIR comments were cut short by a broadcast voice, thin and clear, tremendously amplified, a voice Kendrick recognized at once as that of Cor.

"People of America!" it said. "We of the planet Vada have come to conquer your country. You will be given forty-eight hours to lay down your arms. If complete surrender has not been made by high noon, two days from now, New York will be destroyed."

The voice ceased. The humming recomenced—waned in volume till it died away. Twilight turned one more to midday.

Peering fixedly through the west windows of the laboratory, the little assemblage saw the disc swallowed up in the clear blue sky.

Then they turned, faced one another gravely.

Outside, on the streets, confusion reigned. In newspaper plants, presses were whirling. In telegraph and cable offices, keys were ticking. From radio towers, waves were speeding.

Within an hour, the nation and the world knew of this planetary invader and its staggering ultimatum.

Naturally, the government at Washington refused to meet these shameful terms. Military and naval forces were rushed to the threatened metropolis. The Atlantic Fleet steamed up from Hampton Roads under forced draught and assembled in the outer harbor. Thousands of planes gathered at Mitchell Field and other nearby airdromes.

BUT where was the enemy?

He must be miles up in space, Kendrick knew, as he toiled feverishly in the laboratory over his experiment after a sleepless night. For had that flying city been nearer earth, it could not have maintained invisibility without that peculiar humming vibration.

Scout planes, urged on by impatient squadron commanders, climbed till they reached their ceilings, searching in vain. They could encounter nothing, see nothing of the invader.

Thus passed a morning of growing tension.

But by noon of that day, with a bare

twenty-four hours left before the expiration of the ultimatum, the disc came down, showed itself boldly.

There followed stunning disasters.

One salvo, and the ray shot down—the Atlantic Fleet, the pride of America, burst and melted in flaming hell. Squadrons of planes, carrying tons of bombs, frizzled like moths in the air. Mighty projectiles hurled by land batteries were deflected off on wild trajectories.

Appalled, the nation and the world followed in lurid extras these crushing defeats.

By nightfall of that day, all seemed lost. All opposition had been obliterated. America must capitulate or perish. It had until the next noon to decide which.

MEANWHILE, in that great Brooklyn laboratory, Kendrick was working against time, besieged by frantic delegations of the nation's leaders. They knew now that their one hope lay in him. Was he succeeding? Was there even any hope?

Face haggard, eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, he waved them away, went on with his work.

"I will tell you—as soon as I know."

That was all he would say.

Followed a night that was the blackest in all history, though the myriad stars of heaven shone tauntingly brilliant in the summer sky.

At length, as dawn was breaking, Kendrick paused in his labors.

"There!" he said, grimly, surveying an apparatus that seemed to involve the entire facilities of the laboratory. "It is done! Now then—will it work?"

The delegation were called to witness the test.

Henderson Blake was among them, as was Marjorie. She stepped forward, as he prepared to make the demonstration.

"I *know*, somehow, you're going to be successful!" she murmured, pressing his hand, meeting his eyes with a smile of confidence.

"I hope you're right—Marjorie!" he replied, letting slip the last word almost unconsciously.

Her face colored warmly as she stepped back and rejoined her father.

Kendrick's heart was beating fast as he turned to his instruments. How could he fail, with faith like that behind him?—love, even, perhaps! He mustn't fail—nor would he, if his theories were sound.

ADDRESSING the assemblage, he explained briefly the complicated apparatus.

"These towers," he said, pointing to four steel structures about ten feet high, arranged at the corners of a square roughly twenty feet across, "are miniature radio masts. The area enclosed by them, we will assume, is the city of New York. That metal disc suspended above the area represents the invader. It contains a miniature heat-generator such as I was experimenting with recently in the Arizona desert."

He paused, threw a switch. Somewhere in the laboratory a dynamo began to whir.

"I am now sending electro-magnetic waves from the four towers," he resumed. "But instead of broadcasting them in every direction, I am bending them in concave cathode of force over the city. You may picture this cathode as an invisible shield, if you choose, but it is more than that. It is a reflector. If my theories are right, the radio-energetic ray I am about to project upon it from my miniature disc will be flung back to its source as though it had been a ray of light falling on a mirror. The success of the experiment depends upon what the result will be."

KENDRICK ceased, moved toward a rheostat.

As he made ready to touch it, a breathless tension settled upon the assemblage. Upon the outcome of what was now to happen rested the fate of America—and the world.

Calmly, though every fiber of his being was at breaking stress, the young scientist opened the rheostat.

For an instant, the ray seared down—then, as it boomeranged back, the disc burst into flame, dissolved, disintegrated. A thin dust, like carbon, slowly settled to the laboratory floor.

Cutting off the current from the radio towers, Kendrick faced them, a light of triumph in his tired eyes.

"You see—it works," he said.

They saw. Beyond a doubt, it worked!

And what Kendrick saw, as his eyes met Marjorie's, made him forget his fatigue.

THE rest was a mad scramble of preparation. Only a few brief hours remained, and much was to be done.

The application of the principle that had just been demonstrated involved a hook-up from the Consolidated Electric laboratory with every broadcasting station in the metropolitan area, power being supplied by commandeering every generating plant within a radius of fifty miles.

The city, moreover, had to be evacuated of all but the few brave hundreds who volunteered to stand by their posts at radio stations and generating plants.

As for Kendrick, it was the busiest, most hectic morning he had ever experienced. Only the realization of a girl's love and a nation's trust enabled him to overcome the exhaustion of two sleepless nights.

At length, a little before eleven, all was in readiness. Just two questions troubled the young scientist's mind. Had the people of the disc learned of their preparations to counter the attack? And would the improvised broadcasting apparatus of the area stand the stupendous strain that would be placed upon it if the ray came down?

The first of these questions was answered, staggeringly, at a quarter after eleven.

"Kendrick—oh, my God!" cried Blake, bursting into the laboratory. "Marjorie—they've got her again! Look! Read this!"

He thrust out a piece of paper. Kendrick took it, read:

> Your daughter will be my queen, after this noon.

"Where'd you get it?" he gasped.

"One of the invisible devils thrust it into my hand right out in the street, not five minutes ago," Blake explained, trembling with anguish. "Do you realize what this means, Kendrick? She's on the disc now—and in a scant three-quarters of an hour. . . ."

"Yes, I realize!" his voice came grimly. "And I realize, too, that they don't know their fate. They'll stay. There's forty-five minutes yet. We can't abandon our defense against the ray, not even for Marjorie. But I'll go, I'll rescue her—or die with her!"

And even as Blake mutely reached out his hand to grip that of the determined young man who stood before him, Kendrick touched his wrist mechanism and went invisible.

ONCE on the street, he pressed the escalator button as well—and by the strength of the vibrations that followed, he knew he must be very close within that mysterious lifting zone.

Running west a block, he found it growing stronger.

Fairly racing now, he continued on toward the river, progress unhampered in the deserted streets. Suddenly, with a thrill of exultation, he felt himself swept up, whirled away toward that great shimmering hulk against the sun.

"What hope?" he was thinking. "What possible hope?" And the answer came: Cor!

Reaching the disc, he switched out the escalator influence and hastened across the city to that monumental structure of jade-green stone.

The mighty little dwarf would be up there in his glittering mosaic apartment, or in his pinnacle laboratory,

perhaps, ready to pull the lever that would release that stupendous blast of heat.

Gaining the jewelled door of the monarch's quarters at last, after escaping detection by a hair's breadth more than once, he pressed the button outside, just as the guard had done that first time.

In response, the door opened—and there stood Cor.

HE stood there an instant, that is, while the expression on his leathery face went from inquiry to alarm. Then, as Kendrick burst into the room and shut the door, he went invisible.

In that same instant, the young scientist's eyes beheld a sight that caused his heart to leap. There sat Marjorie, bound in a chair, an expression half of hope, half of dejection, on her face.

"It's I—Gordon!" he called. "Take courage!"

"Oh, I prayed so you'd come—and you came!" she murmured as her face lighted. Then, tensely, she added, "The door—look out!"

Kendrick wheeled, and just in time. The door was opening.

"Not so fast!" he called, lunging.

His hands gripped the dwarf, yanked him back, throttled him before he could emit a cry, pushed the door shut.

Cor struggled like a madman, but it was futile. Kendrick's hands cut into his throat like a vice. After a moment or two, he gasped, relaxed.

Releasing his grip then, Kendrick felt for his wrist, stripped off his bracelet—whereupon the dwarf became visible. His face was putty-white. He was either dead or unconscious.

Restoring his own visibility then, he advanced to Marjorie, swiftly freed her.

"Take this!" he said, handing her Cor's bracelet.

She slipped it on.

"Now let's tie him and get out of here. He may be dead, but we can't take any chances.

THE dwarf wasn't dead, however, for he groaned and opened his eyes as they lifted him into the chair.

"You win, Professor—but it avails you nothing!" He smiled maliciously. "My capture, my death even, will not prevent the ray. The orders have been given. It will be projected sharp at twelve. You but go to your doom!"

"That," said Kendrick, "is a matter of opinion."

Swiftly they bound him, gagged him.

"And now," he added, "we wish you good day—and such fate as you deserve!"

Then, turning to Marjorie:

"Your hand again!"

There was a new tenderness in its soft warmth that thrilled him.

They touched their buttons, went invisible.

Silently, then, they stole from the apartment. Swiftly they made their way down to the concourse, raced across the city to the amber court, descended to the trap-door.

It must be nearly twelve, Kendrick knew. He couldn't look at his watch, for it as well as himself was invisible. Indeed, even as they stood there, poised for the plunge, a faint whistle rose from below.

Marjorie trembled.

"Steady!" he spoke. "Some of them always blow a minute or two before. Are you ready?"

"Yes!"

"Then press your button—jump!"

Even as they leapt, the sickening thought came that perhaps the escalator ray was no longer running. But the fear was unwarranted. They were caught up, whirled gently downward.

Moving along laterally, as they descended, they were able to land without difficulty in the middle of a deserted street near the Consolidated Electric laboratory.

"Thank heaven!" she sighed, as their feet touched solid ground. They pressed off both buttons, becoming visible once more.

"Echo!" he agreed. "So let's—"

BUT Kendrick never completed that sentence—for now whistles all over the metropolitan area, rising from the generating plants, announced the ominous hour.

It was high noon. The ultimatum had expired.

Lifting tense faces to the disc, they waited. Would that stupendous ray be hurled back upon itself? Or would it sear through their makeshift defense, plunging them and the whole great metropolis into oblivion?

Suddenly, cataclysmically, the answer came.

There burst a withering whirlwind from the disc. It struck that mighty concave cathode of interlaced waves above the city. There followed an instant's clash of titanic forces. Then the cathode triumphed, hurled it back.

Rocked by a concussion as of two worlds in impact, blinded by a glare that made the sunlight seem feeble in comparison, Marjorie and Kendrick clung together, while the disc grew into a satellite of calcium fire in the sky.

Presently, as the conflagration waned, they opened their eyes. Gravely, but with deep thanksgiving, they searched each other's faces. In them they read deep understanding, too, and a new hope.

"I think we'd better go and find father," she said at length, quietly.

"I think so too!" he agreed.

As they headed toward the laboratory, a fine, powdery dust, like volcanic ash, was falling.

It continued to fall until the city streets were covered to a depth of an inch or more.

Thus passed the menace of Vada.

NO ONE MUST FORGET

That he has a standing invitation to

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And join in the general discussion of stories, authors, likes, dislikes—everything pertaining to

ASTOUNDING STORIES

And Science-Fiction

A Meeting Place for Readers of Astounding Stories

To the Rescue

Dear Editor:

I hope you can see fit to print this letter in the July issue of Astounding Stories. This letter is written in defence of Ray Cummings and in reply to the letter of C. Harry Jaeger, 2900 Jordan Road, Oakland, California.

Following is an extract of Mr. Jaeger's letter: "Also I like my authors to make an original contribution to whatever theory of science they develop fictionally. This, Ray Cummings does not do in his very interesting story, "Phantoms of Reality." His beginning is palpably borrowed from Francis Flagg's story, "The Blue Dimension," which appeared in a Science Fiction magazine in 1927." Another paragraph is devoted to explaining his claim. He claims that Cummings' method of transposing his characters from one dimension or plane to another is practically copied from Flagg's story. The method, that is, not the narration. I hope to prove that if any borrowing was done, is was done by Flagg. Incidentally, Flagg's story "The Blue Dimension" was printed in 1928, not 1927, as Mr. Jaeger says.

I have in my possession a story by Ray Cummings named "Into the Fourth Dimension" and published in another magazine during the last month of 1926 and first ones of 1927. And in this story—printed two years before Flagg's story—Cummings uses almost the same apparatus of passing from one dimension to another as is used in "Phantoms of Reality." I will not discuss whether this procedure is to be approved or not.

This letter is not to be construed as an attack on Mr. Jaeger, or Mr. Flagg, or on either of the two stories under discussion.

If Mr. Jaeger will let me know I will send him Ray Cummings' story "Into the Fourth Dimension," as clipped from the magazines.

I write this letter to the magazine, instead of Mr. Jaeger, so that if any one was misled by Mr. Jaeger's well meant but mistaken criticism they will be straightened out.—Donald Coneyon, Petoskey, Michigan.

A Wish for Success

Dear Editor:

I have read both of your first issues. I am writing to say that I wish you success with your new magazine, which I know will succeed.

Also to say I wish you would get more of the "Carnes and Dr. Bird Stories" by Captain S. P. Meek, for I think everybody, including myself, likes them. I also enjoyed "Creatures of the Light."—Thomas D. Taylor, 415 So. 7th St., Boise, Idaho.

No Kick Any More

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of Astounding Stories ever since you started it, and I guess I'm getting too particular as I don't get the kick out of it any more that I did out of the first issues. That is, I don't get the kick out of ALL of the stories as I did at first. However, "Murder Madness" sure is a hot one. Why not print a story by Sax Rohmer, H. G. Wells, or some of them?—H. Elsworth Jones, Box 840, R. R. 6, Battle Creek, Mich.

Via Postcard

Dear Editor:

Astounding Stories is an astounding magazine. It has really astounding stories. It couldn't be better. There's hardly room for improvement. May Astounding Stories be more astounding yet. I like it!—Monroe Hood Stinson, 1742 12th Ave., Oakland, California.

Only Fiction!

Dear Editor:

I have just finished a story in the February, 1930, issue of Astounding Stories entitled "Into Space," by Sterner St. Paul.

I would like to know if it is a true story, if the actions described in it really happened, or is it merely a story of fiction.—Dan S. Scherrer, Shawneetown, Ill.

Perhaps—Soon

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading your new magazine, Astounding Stories. It is the best magazine I have ever read. Keep up the good work and you will find me a constant reader. I have only one suggestion to make: Let Astounding Stories come out every other Thursday.—Harold Kolko, 433 Palmer E., Detroit, Michigan.

More Preferences

Dear Editor:

I have read with great interest the second issue of Astounding Stories and note your invitation for readers to express themselves.

I enjoyed the whole magazine, finding the literary quality surprisingly high. Especially good were "Spawn of the Stars," and "Creatures of the Light." Harl Vincent's tale was the best of his I have read; and Captain Meek's are always good. "The Corpse on the Grating," however, was merely Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" done over, and not half so well.

As for the sort of tales I like, here they are in order of preference:

1. Tales of weird mystery—Merritt's "Moon Pool" and his others; Taine's "White Lily."

2. Interplanetary Adventure—"A Columbus of Space," by Serviss; "The Skylark of Space," by Smith.

3. "Different stories," that defy classification, based on new ideas of science—most of Wells' short stories are examples.

4. Detective, Fourth Dimension, and air adventure—only well done.—Jack Williamson, Box 661 Canyon, Texas.

A Brick or Two

Dear Editor:

For the last three years we have been reading any and all of the various Science Fiction magazines which have appeared upon the market. We therefore feel that we are as well qualified as anyone to offer the criticism and advice that follows.

First, the stories. We feel that it would be a good idea to get your stories from the same authors whose work has been and is being accepted by the other magazines in this field. In one case you have already done this, and I consider his stories to be the best in each issue. I believe that you will be forced to do this eventually, anyhow, because the people who read this magazine will naturally be readers of the others also, and will therefore, be used to the standards set by those publications. Then, you should have someone who is well qualified to pass upon the science in the stories.

Second, the cover design and the pictures at the beginning of each story. Up to this time the cover and inside pictures have contained many mistakes. The cover of the March issue was especially atrocious. In the first place a voyager in outer space would find it jet black and studded with stars, instead of blue and apparently empty, except for a few tremendously oversize planets, a moon with entirely too many craters, and a total eclipse of the sun with a very much distorted corona visible beside the earth. Illustrations by your cover artist also appear in another publication, but these are much superior to the ones in Astounding Stories. Here also a scientific advisor would be welcome.

Third, I think it would be a good idea to have a department in which the readers could write their opinions of the stories and suggest improvements in the conduct of the magazine.

Fourth, I think there should be a scientific editorial in each issue by some eminent scientist. This is also a feature in the other magazines.

We hope that you take these criticisms and suggestions, as they were offered, in good faith. We also hope that the circulation will increase as the magazine becomes better.—George L. Williams and Harry Heillisan, 5714 Howe St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

"Wonderful"

Dear Editor:

I received your magazine last week, Astounding Stories, and I think it is wonderful. I am very glad that I subscribed for it. I can hardly wait to get the latest one which I hoped to receive to-day and was very much disappointed when it did not arrive. I hope you will consider a quarterly or at least an annual in the near future.

I wish you all success with this magazine, and hope you will forgive my writing you so

often in reference to your magazine.—Louis Wentzler, 1938 Woodbine St., Brooklyn, New York.

—But We Made Our Bow Only Last January!

Dear Editor:

Last month my boy brought one copy of this magazine home, and I want to ask you if you would send me the copies from last January, 1929, up to December, 1929. If you charge no more than $3.00 would you send them C. O. D.? Do you have the issues for 1928, too?

I never knew there was a magazine like that on the market. I never bought one because most of them are no good, and when one has children one has to be doubly careful.

But this magazine is just right. No silly love stories and mushy stuff in them. It sure keeps your mind from unpleasant things. We can get them from the newsstand but I would like to subscribe for them.

Keep up the good work and please send me the last year's copies and let me know if I could get 1928, too.—Mrs. M. Ristan, 4684 No. Broadway, Denver, Colorado.

"Best One Yet"

Dear Editor:

The April issue is the best one you have put out yet. Arthur J. Burks is GOOD. I hope to see much more of him in the future. "Brigands of the Moon," by Ray Cummings, is getting better with each instalment. The stories of Dr. Bird are always interesting. I would like to see one in each issue, if you could arrange for it.

As long as the other readers like the size of Astounding Stories, I will, too, but please cut all edges smooth like the latest issue of Five Novels Monthly. I would also like to see a full-page illustration with each story, and if possible by Wesso.

I am glad that you are starting another serial in the May issue of Astounding Stories. I like serials and I hope that you will always have two in each issue.

Your schedule for the May issue looks good, and I'm sure it will be, with such authors as Murray Leinster, Victor Rousseau, Ray Cummings, Harl Vincent and Sewell P. Wright.

I am still waiting for a different colored cover.—Jack Darrow, 4225 N. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

An Enthusiastic Reader

Dear Editor:

As a reader of long standing of Science Fiction I feel I am qualified to make some remarks and give my opinion of the wonderful Astounding Stories magazine lately put out. Although I read three other Science Fiction magazines none of them have aroused in me such a wonderful enthusiasm as Astounding Stories. Before I forget it I want to mention that I read two quarterlies also.

The reason, or rather reasons, for my enthusiasm I will now enumerate. (1) The stories are wonderful. (2) The binding is very strong and efficient. (3) The print is just right, and soothing to the eyes of one who reads much. The paper is good, and the size and price of the magazine is just right. The covers are excellent, and with the addition of "The Readers' Corner" the magazine becomes absolutely perfect. Truly a wonderful start. See that it is kept up. The only thing that can still spoil the magazine is poor stories. Science Fiction stories that contain no science.

In "Vampires of Venus" the plot was rather weak. Even if the Venerians knew nothing of entomology, they should have brains enough to get rid of the vampires the way Leslie Larner did without having to call an Earthman to help them. Another thing: the Venerians kept only insects that were not harmful to the crops. On Earth there are such insects who help the farmer by eating harmful insects. If the harmful insects were exterminated—an almost impossible and gigantic task—the harmless insects would change their diet and become harmful, too. And it seems funny, too, that such a highly civilized planet as Venus should still depend on domesticated animals for food, drink and clothing instead of manufacturing what they need synthetically.

The April cover on your magazine was wonderful.

Before I close I wish to say a word about the Science Correspondence Club of which I am a proud member. There is little to say, however, after reading Conrad Ruppert's letter in the April issue. The membership has increased to over 300 now, numbering among them quite a number of famous scientists and authors. All I can say is that I hope every scientifically inclined person of whatever nationality, creed, color or sex they may be, will join this wonderful and rapidly progressing club. I will now close thanking the publishers of Astounding Stories for issuing such a wonderful magazine.—Stan Osowski, 62 Railroad St., Central Falls, R. I.

But—Conniston Was An Impostor!

Dear Editor:

I read with interest Mr. Ray Cummings' story, "Brigands of the Moon," in the March number of Astounding Stories. The tale was a worthy one from the pen of so clever a writer. I do think, however, that the author might have left out the point about Sir Arthur Conniston, an English gentleman, turning traitor. This sort of thing is hardly calculated to bring about a friendly feeling between England and America, the two greatest countries in the world. I have the greatest admiration for the United States, and though we may have a little fun at each other's expense, there is no ill feeling meant, but I really hope you will not publish any other story like that one.—An Englishman, Montreal, Canada.

Likes the Romance

Dear Editor:

I have just finished my second copy of Astounding Stories and I wish to say I have enjoyed every story.

For some time I have been a reader of Science Fiction, but none will compare to Astounding Stories. These stories seem to have the proper amount of romance in them to make them really interesting, and it adds the proper touch.

I have no criticism to make. May I wish you a great success with this magazine.—Frank I. Sontog, 825 Prescott Ave., Scranton, Pa.

High Praise

Dear Editor:

Allow me to congratulate you upon the establishment of "The Readers' Corner." I do not know which was the first issue of your delightful magazine, but I have been buying it regularly for quite a few months.

I may not be an experienced critic, but it can be easily seen by anyone that this magazine is one of the best on sale. I, for one, enjoy your stories more than any other stories I have ever read.

I have just finished the second part of the four-part serial entitled "Brigands of the Moon." I think Ray Cummings is the best author I have ever met up with in stories. The drawings are fine, the print is excellent, but I think the paper could be improved. But by no means change the size of your little magazine. The size is just right.

In your April issue I read in "The Readers' Corner" about a Science Correspondence Club. Believe me when I say I'm sending immediately for an application blank. I think the idea of this club is excellent.

Truly you have contributed a great gift to Science Fiction readers in offering this magazine to the receptive public.—Theodore L. Page, 2361 Los Angeles Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

"Don't Do It!"

Dear Editor:

This afternoon I saw Astounding Stories for the first time and immediately grabbed a copy, as I have read others of the Clayton group, and moreover am a Science Fiction fan.

The newsstand has no back numbers, and I simply must have the March 1930 issue, as I wish to read "Brigands of the Moon," so here is 25c. in stamps to cover purchase price and cost of mailing me a copy of that issue.

Have you a complete file since Vol. 1, No. 1? If so, what is the cost including charges? I'm sorry that I missed this magazine before, but you can rest assured that I'll miss no more.

In the "Readers' Corner" I notice a call from Stephen Takacs for a change in size. DON'T DO IT! The size and shape are O. K., and to make it the awkward size of most magazines (including two of the Science Fiction magazines that I am now a confirmed reader of), would not improve it a bit.

You have two of my favorite authors in the April number; no, I see it is three—Burks, Cummings and Meek. They are O.K., but don't forget a few others, such as Burroughs, Verrill, Hamilton, Coblentz, Keller, Quinn, Williamson, Leinster, Repp, Vincent, Flagg—oh, why continue; you certainly know all the good authors of OUR kind of fiction; try them all. Of course, the other Science Fiction magazines that I take are full of stories by my favorites, but you can get stories by them too.

From this one issue that I have read I can see only praise for your publication. Here's to a long life and a happy one.

Don't forget to send me the March issue as fast as the mail can get it here.—Robert J. Hyatt, 1358 Kenyon St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

"Worst Ever Read"

Dear Editor:

Since you invite criticism as well as praise, I am impelled to state that by far the worst story I ever read in any Science Fiction magazine was "Vampires of Venus," by Anthony Pelcher, which appeared in your April issue. It was so idiotic, so flat and inane, that it might have passed for a burlesque rather than a straight story, were it not painfully evident that the author was serious. The yarn was unworthy of Astounding Stories and did not belong in this magazine.

The other stories, except for an amateurish attempt called "The Man Who Was Dead," were deeply engrossing and of unusual merit. —Sears Langell, 1214 Boston Road, New York.

"The Readers' Corner"

All Readers are extended a sincere and cordial invitation to "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and join in our monthly discussion of stories, authors, scientific principles and possibilities—everything that's of common interest in connection with our Astounding Stories.

Although from time to time the Editor may make a comment or so, this is a department primarily for *Readers*, and we want you to make full use of it. Likes, dislikes, criticisms, explanations, roses, brickbats, suggestions—everything's welcome here; so "come over in 'The Readers' Corner'" and discuss it with all of us!

—The Editor.

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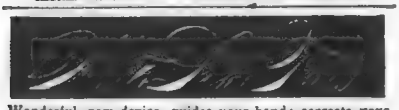

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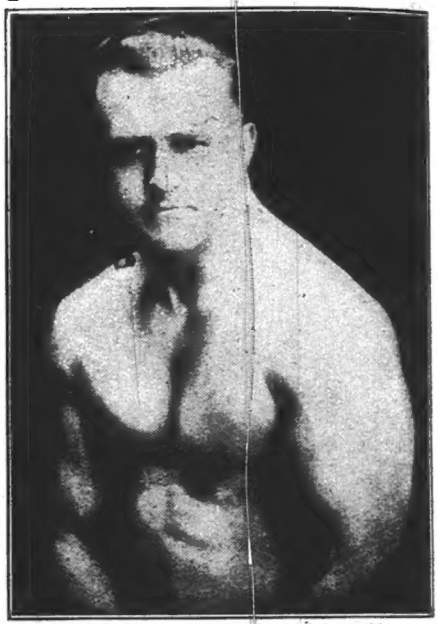

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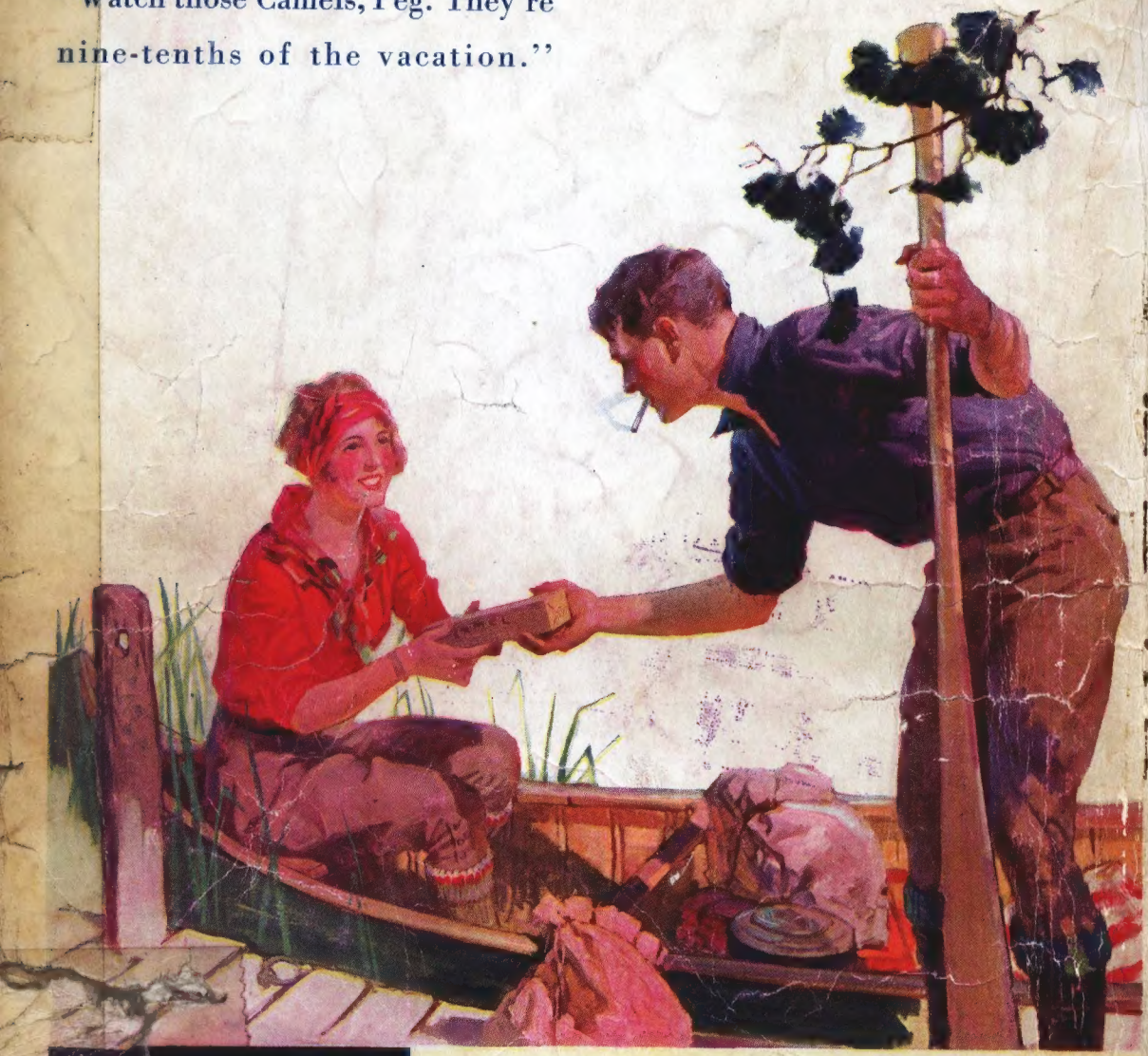

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